



Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism Series - Session 1

A Tale of Two Systems: Responding to Unexcused and Excused Absences

Welcome!



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Deputy Executive Director,
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Educational Excellence

- Recording & slides will be posted to CCEE [website](#)
- Slides will be linked in the chat
- **Questions/Comments:** please use the Q&A or “Raise Hand” feature
- Complete the **poll** to indicate your role

Presenters



Hedy Chang
Executive Director,
Attendance Works



Clea McNeely
Research Professor,
University of Tennessee,
Knoxville



Kevin Gee
Associate Professor,
UC Davis

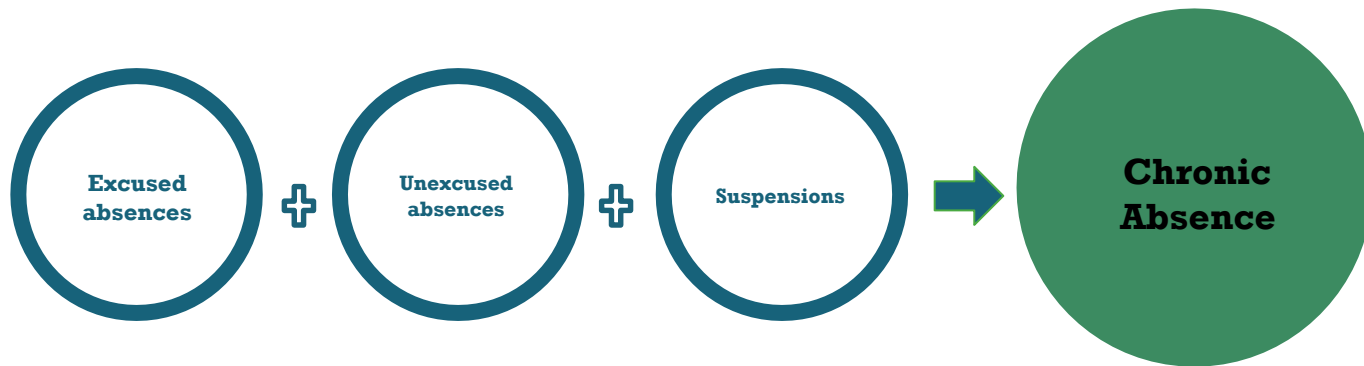
In California, accountability requirements to monitor and reduce chronic absence exist on top of longstanding truancy related practices and policies.



What is chronic absence?

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk.

Chronic absence is defined as **missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.**



Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

Chronic Absence vs. Truancy

Truancy

- ▲ Counts ONLY unexcused absences
- ▲ Emphasizes individual compliance with school rules
- ▲ Uses legal, typically more blaming and punitive, solutions



Chronic Absence

- Counts ALL absences (*excused, unexcused & suspensions*)
- Emphasizes impact of missed days and benefits of being present
- Uses preventative, problem-solving, trauma-sensitive strategies
- Cultivates family & student engagement



Reducing chronic absence requires addressing the challenges that keep students from getting to school

Barriers

- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Inequitable access to needed services
- Cultural & linguistic challenges navigating schools
- System involvement
- Lack of predictable schedules & routine
- Lack of access to tech
- Community violence

Aversion

- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or disability accommodations
- Parents had negative educational experiences

Disengagement

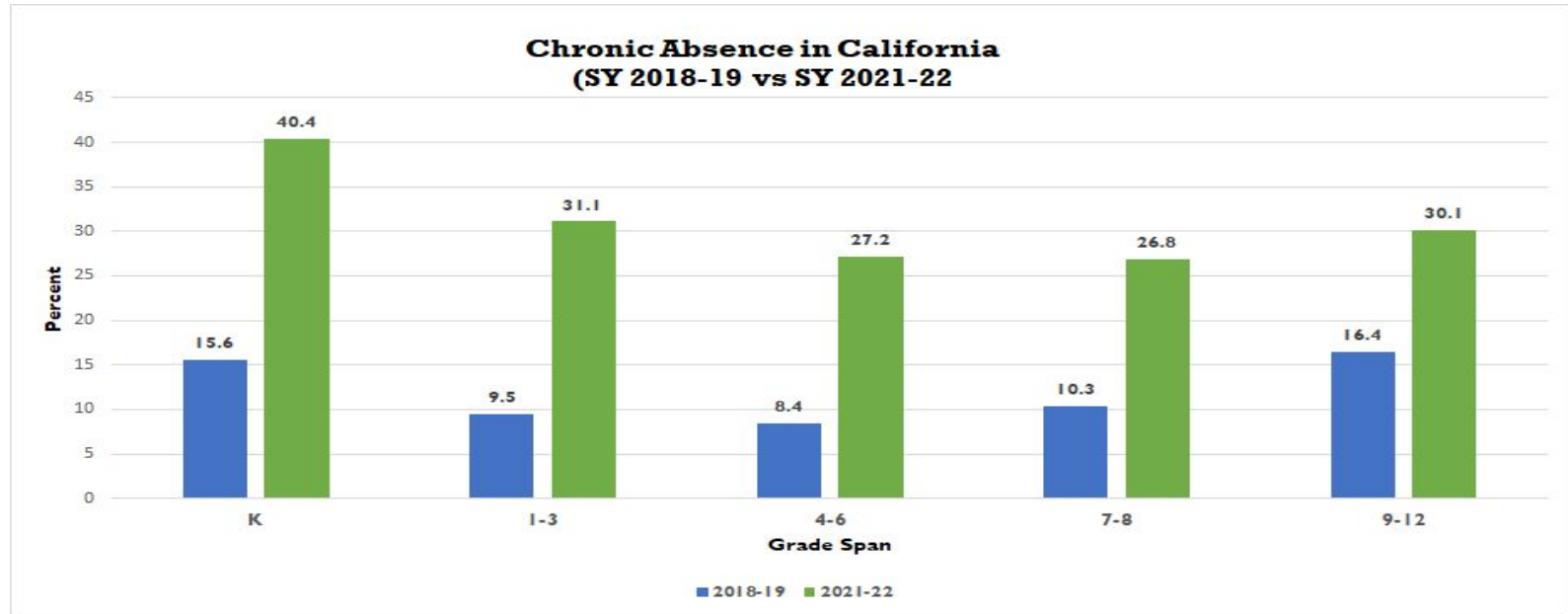
- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Drawn to low-wage job vs. being in high school

Misconceptions

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Sporadic absences aren't a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

Effective approaches to improving attendance are urgently needed.

Chronic absenteeism has skyrocketed



Disparities in Unexcused Absences Across California Schools

March 21, 2023

<https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/disparities-unexcused-absences-across-california-schools>

By Clea McNeely, Hedy N. Chang, and Kevin Gee with Joshua Childs, Cecelia Leong, and Janet Rosenbaum.

Consider This

Two students are sick. Both miss 5 days of school.

One student has a family physician and parents familiar with school policies. This student returns to school with a doctor's note, and their five absences are excused.

The other student's family cannot afford to see a doctor. This second student returns to school without a doctor's note, and their five absences are unexcused. The family receives a letter that their child is truant and that they may be taken to court if the absenteeism continues.

Does this Scenario Happen in Your District?

- ❑ If so, how does that affect how your schools partner with students and families to identify and address absenteeism and support engagement in school?
- ❑ Which student populations are most affected?

How Unexcused Label Affects School Response

Response To Excused	Response to To Unexcused
Help with homework	Denial of help or no credit for homework
Make-up exams	No make-up exams
Home tutoring provided	Denial of class credit
	Removal from extra-curricular activities
	Send notices of truancy
	If unexcused absences accumulate despite earlier outreach from schools and districts, courts can
	Fine student and parents
	Require community service program or parenting program
	Charge parents with misdemeanor

How Unexcused Label Affects Families

If families perceive an unexcused label is unfairly applied, it can undermine trust and make it more difficult to partner with students and families to understand and address underlying attendance barriers.

This can undermine other student and family engagement strategies.

Report purpose

Call to action to leverage data to advance a more preventive, problem-solving, and equitable responses to attendance.

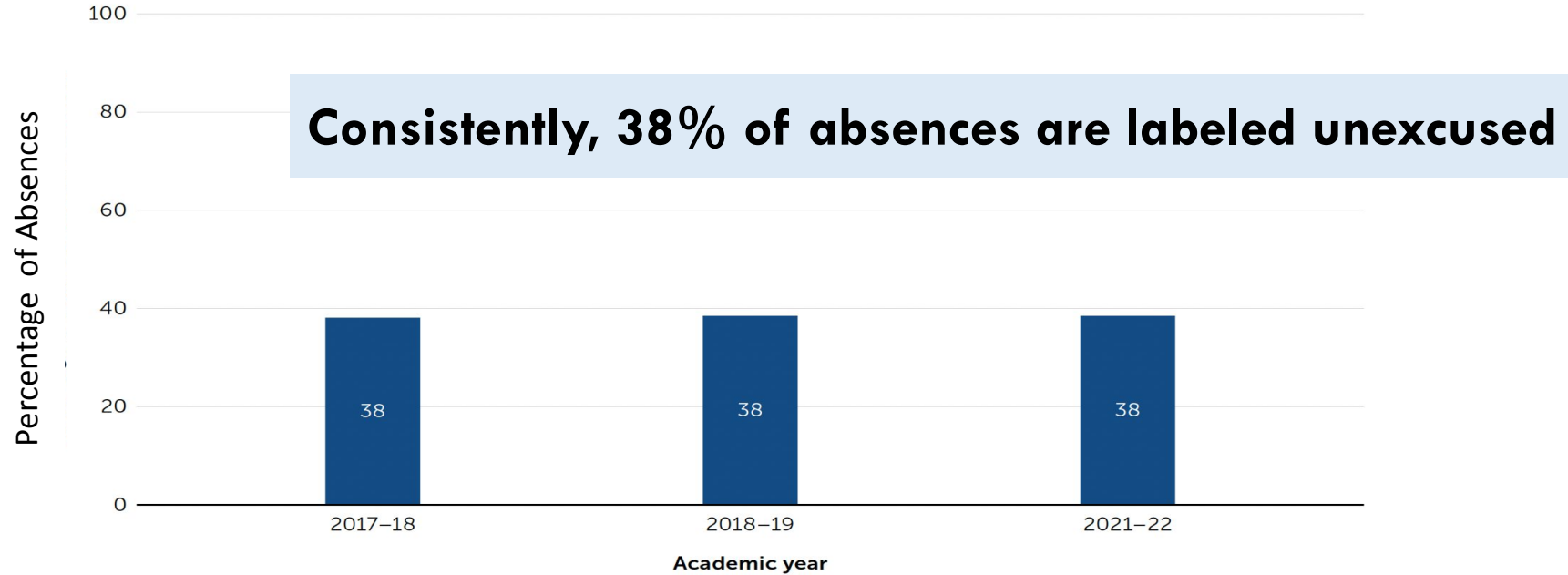
Report overview

- ❏ Reviews current truancy policies and practices
- ❏ Examines disparities in unexcused absences in California
- ❏ Offers recommendations for using data to detect and address disparate responses to truancy to advance equitable opportunities to learn.

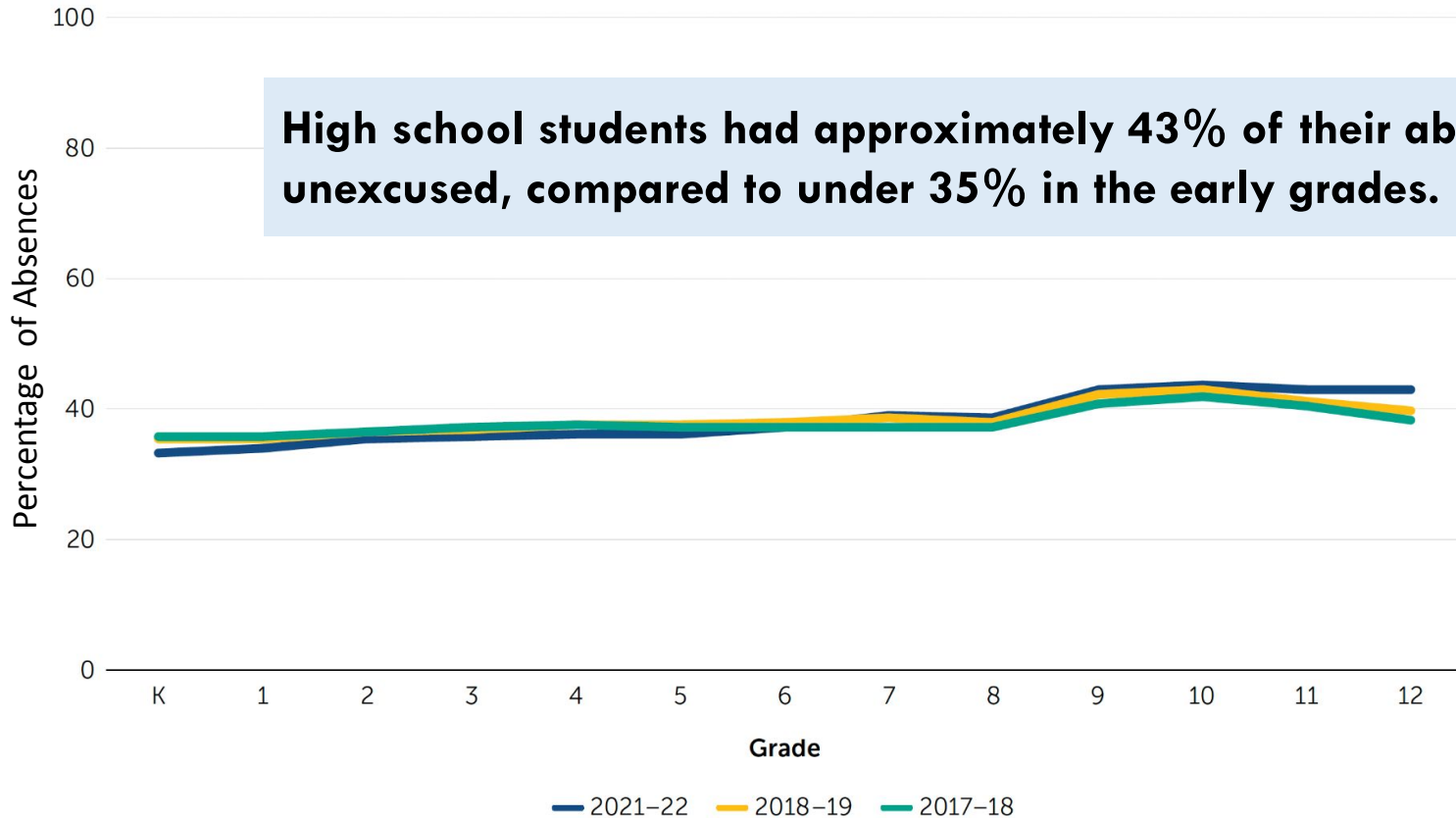
Data Sources

- California Department of Education's interactive [DataQuest](#) database and publicly available data files for SY 2017-18, SY 2018-19 and SY 2021-22.
- A scan of district and school attendance policies for a random sample of 40 middle and high schools:
 - 20 schools > 90 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged
 - 20 schools < 50% socioeconomically disadvantaged

1. What portion of absences are unexcused?



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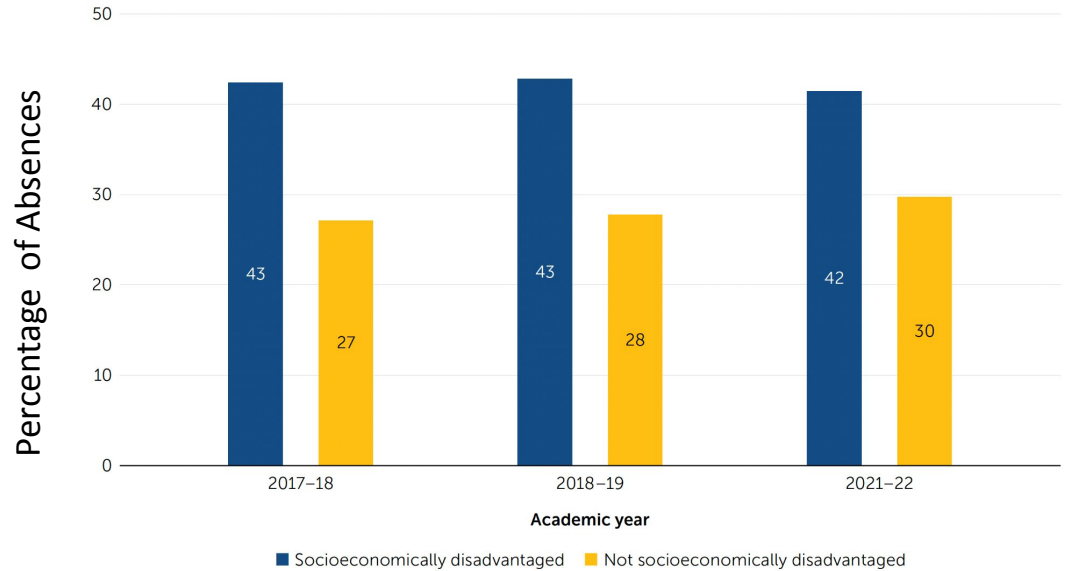


2. Do schools that apply the unexcused label more have better attendance?

Chronic absence was higher in schools that used the unexcused label more (37.5% vs. 27.7% in SY 2021-22)

3. Are there disparities?

Socioeconomic disadvantage

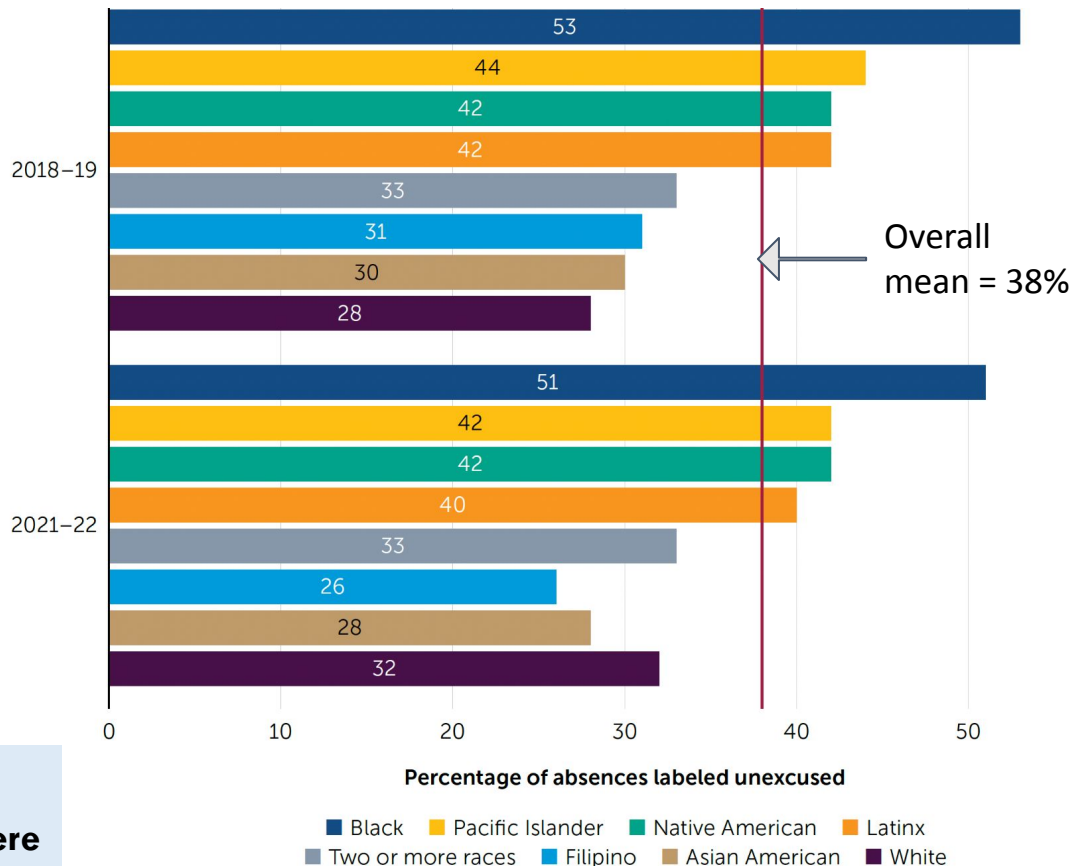


The socioeconomic disparity shrunk slightly in SY 2021-22.

3. Are there disparities?

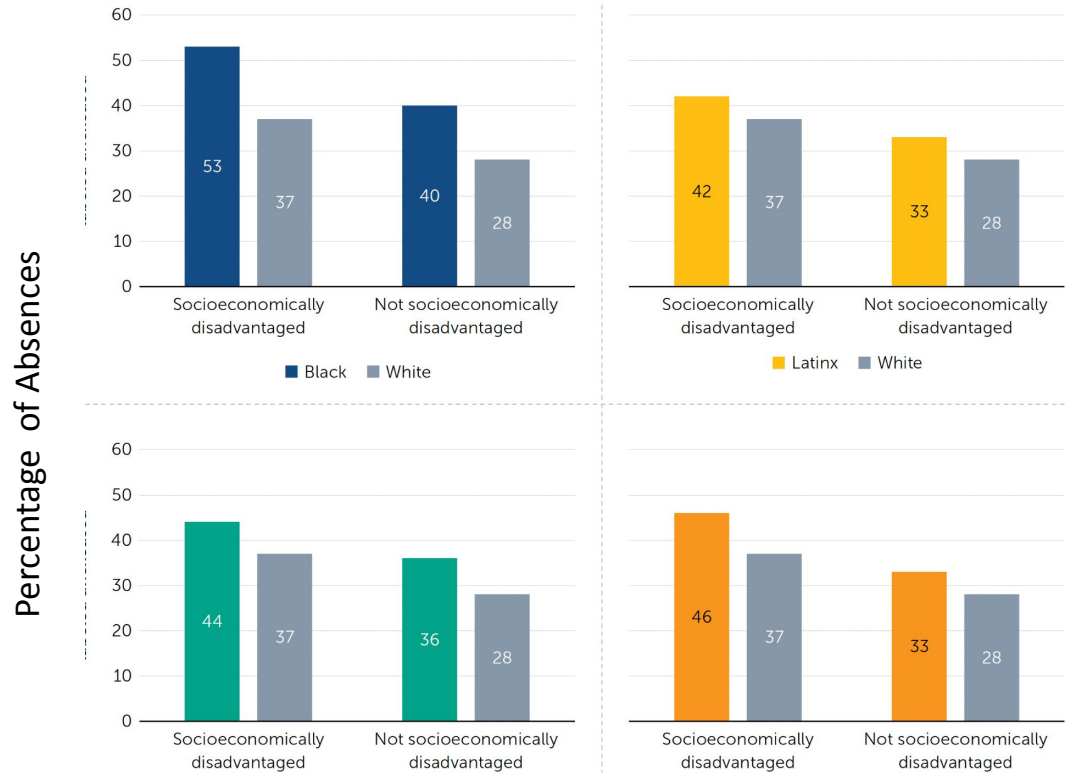
Race and ethnicity

Black, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Latinx students were most likely to have any given absence labeled unexcused.



3. Are there disparities?

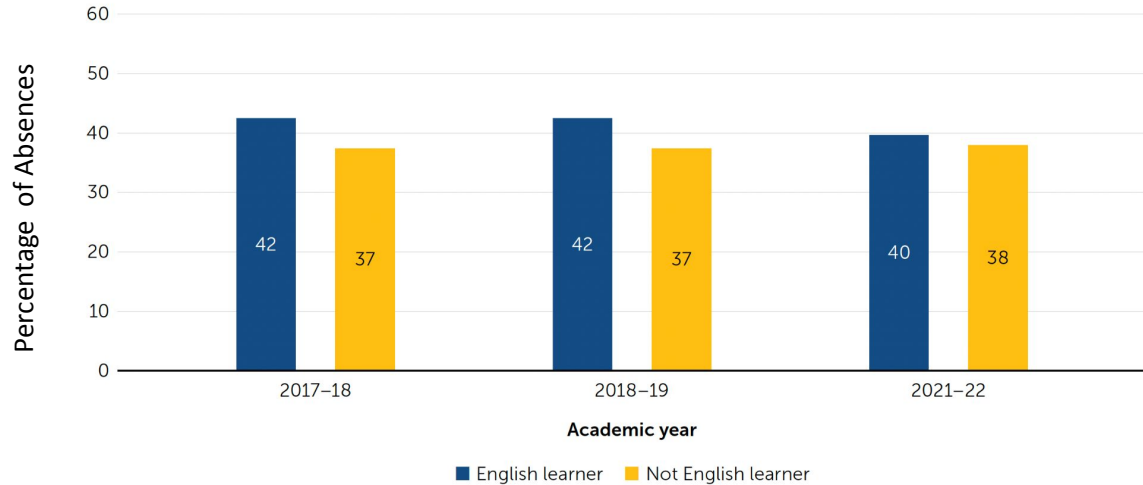
Racial and ethnic disparities were only partially due to SES



Large disparities in unexcused absenteeism persisted within each socioeconomic strata in SY 2021-22 for Black, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Hispanic students compared to White students.

3. Are there disparities?

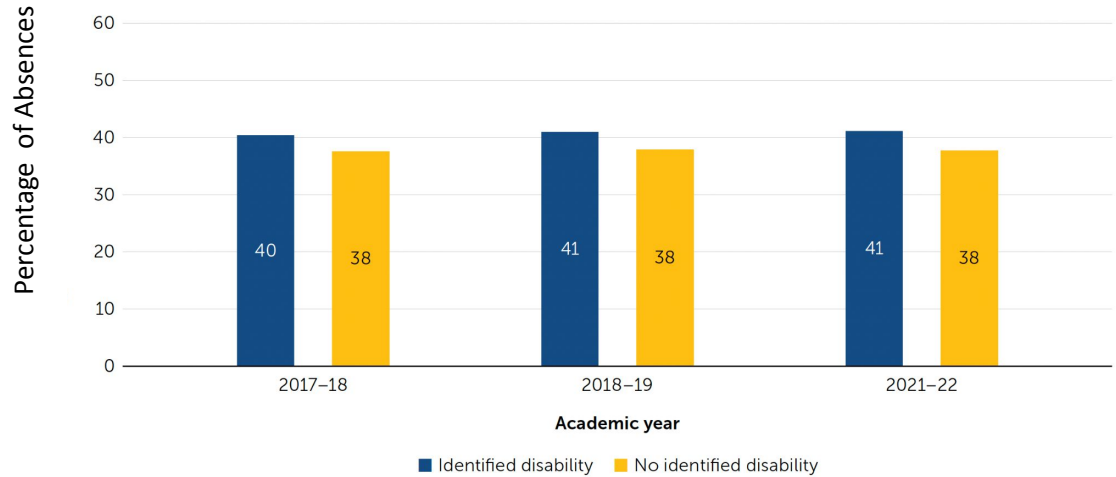
English learners



Disparities in labeling absences unexcused were relatively small for English learners compared to their peers.

3. Are there disparities?

Disability status



Disparities by disability status were also relatively small.

4. Do schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities communicate more punitive attendance policies?

Many schools' handbooks and websites did not reflect current state attendance laws. This did not vary by school socioeconomic status.

- ❑ Several schools told parents their child could be suspended for truancy.
- ❑ Only one school told parents that school staff had discretion regarding whether to label an absence unexcused.
- ❑ No schools had added mental health as a reason for excused absence (but law had just passed when review was conducted).

4. Do schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities communicate more punitive attendance policies?

The handbooks and websites of schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities were more likely to warn that these punitive actions would be taken for truancy:

- suspend driver's license
- take away school privileges like extracurricular activities
- require in-school detention (or Saturday school)
- take students and families to court

Attendance Policy

In accordance with state law, all children between 6 – 18 years of age must attend school full time until the end of the term, quarter, or semester in which they become 18 years of age, or have graduated from high school.

- Students should be on campus no later than 8:00 a.m.
- Students must attend school 85% of the school year.
- Three absences excused or unexcused will cause parents to receive a truancy letter.
- Three tardies equal one absence.
- Students with excessive absences will be referred to the School Attendance and Review Team (SART).

School Attendance is **MANDATORY**. [REDACTED] is a place where students not only learn the academic skills to prepare them for college or the world of work but the life skills needed to survive and attain success in our society. We believe that setting high goals (in the area of attendance and promptness) is very important to our student's as good habits. These skills will serve the students well on the road to self-mastery. **Every student is expected to come to school and be on time for all classes – ESPECIALLY FIRST PERIOD.**

Links

School Information Sheet

Attendance Policy

Bell Schedule

Conduct and Behavior

School-Parent Compact

Hi! How might we help you today?

Forms

- ✓ AERIES Student Information Base
- ✓ Elective Preferences (Incoming Grade 6)
- ✓ Elective Preferences (Rising Grade 7)
- ✓ Elective Preferences (Rising Grade 8)
- ✓ Yearbook Order (school code 6690)
- ✓ Aim High Summer Program Application



Call Us

Attendance Line:



Main Office Line:



Fax:



February 2023

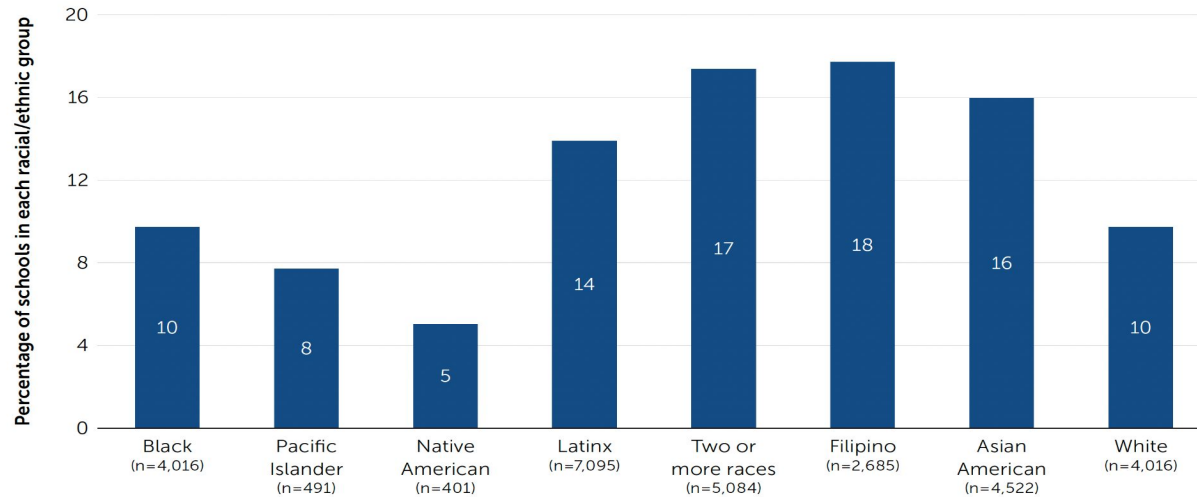
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[« Sep](#)

Notes

What would you like to see here? Let us know.

5. Are there bright spot schools with fewer disparities and higher attendance?



Criteria: (a) above-average levels of attendance (defined as fewer than 11.7 days absent); (b) below-average levels of unexcused absenteeism (below 33.8 percent); and (c) a disparity between the racial or ethnic comparison group and White students that is smaller than two-tenths of a standard deviation.

Recommendations for Action

- 1. Use data to learn about disparities and identify bright spots.**
- 2. Invest in better practices and data systems for monitoring and understanding reasons for both excused and unexcused absences.**

Recommendations for Action

- 3. Review and update local and state policies related to unexcused absences.**
- 4. Assess and improve how attendance practices and policies are communicated to students and families.**
- 5. Invest in professional development to improve attendance and truancy practices.**

Discussion

1. Questions? Reactions?



DataQuest provides meaningful data and statistics about California's K-12 public educational system that supports a wide variety of informational, research, and policy needs. Summary and detailed data reports are available for multiple subject areas at the school, district, county, and state levels.

To create a report:

1. Select a report **Level**
2. Select a report **Subject**
3. Select **Submit**

Data Resources

- [What's NEW? DataQuest Change Log](#)
- [QuickQuest](#) lets you find answers fast!
- [Downloadable Data Files](#)
- [California School Dashboard](#)
- [CAASPP/ELPAC Test Results](#)
- [Data Requests](#)

Other CDE Resources

- [CA Department of Education Home](#)

1. Select Level

2. Select Subject

3. Select Submit

[CDE Home](#) » [DataQuest](#) » Select Criteria

Select Year of Data and Enter District Name

1) Determine a time frame.

Single year -- select year:

2) Type a portion of the name then press the "Submit" button.

<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

1) **Go to data quest**

2) **Select district & absenteeism data**
then press submit.

3) **Enter a district name;** select absenteeism by reason

4) **What do you see?** For any student populations, is the percent of unexcused absence especially high (> than 38 %)

Or, do you have a potential bright spot with a low % of unexcused absence for a group with typically high levels?

Optional: Look at Report Options and Filters. See Program, Subgroup, Grade Level, Academic Year

What is the name of your district?
Did you see any particular
racial/ethnic group with especially
high unexcused absences? A bright
spot?

Discussion

Thank you!

- **Reminder:** Slides and recording will be posted on CCEE's [website](#)
- **Post-Session Survey**
 - Office Hours (“Special Interest Group”)
- **Next in this series:**
 - Session 2 - Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism with Salinas City Elementary School District (Date TBD)
 - Session 3 - Supporting Better Attendance Practices: The Evolving Role of COEs (Date TBD)
- **Upcoming Open Door Session:** [One County’s Journey to Improve Mathematics Instruction at Scale](#) (Merced COE)
 - Tues. 4/4 from 2:00 - 2:45 pm