

Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism Series - Session 1

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

Below are the responses to questions submitted to the presenters during the first Open Door session of the Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism Series, A Tale of Two Systems: Responding to Unexcused and Excused Absences, held on April 3, 2023. Questions that were submitted are not necessarily provided verbatim, and may have been edited for clarity, but have not been altered in substance. Questions that are similar or on the same topic have been grouped together for ease of navigation and response.

Presenters:



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TOOLS & RESOURCES

- Can you provide any guidance that California uses to determine when to excuse absences?
***RESPONSE:** The California Department of Education website has information on the definitions of excused and unexcused absences [here](#).*
- Could you share the link to DataQuest?
***RESPONSE:** Please find the CDE DataQuest site [here](#). You will find summary and detailed data reports for multiple subject areas at the school, district, county, and state levels including Absenteeism Data by Reason (Excused/Unexcused).*
- Did you find any interesting strategies being used by school districts, schools or states to help build parent/student awareness of chronic absenteeism and the issues/challenges with that?
***RESPONSE:** A useful tool is the [Attendance Works Root Causes webpage](#) which includes tiered intervention strategies. We will also be highlighting strategies in the upcoming sessions of the Shifting Mindsets on Chronic Absenteeism series.*
CCEE Note: Make sure to check CCEE's [Events Calendar](#) or follow CCEE on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to stay up-to-date on future sessions.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES ABOUT ATTENDANCE

- How do we tag students who are not attending school and the parent is okay with this?

***RESPONSE:** In such a situation, it becomes even more important to examine the root cause(s) behind the absence. For example, a student could be staying home due to anxiety or concerns about attending school, so as a parent, they choose to have the student stay home because they feel it is best for their child - even if the school might label the absence as unexcused. And so, whether you count it excused or unexcused, the priority should be to figure out the root causes of the absence and address it so that the child attends school again.*

- We have a large portion of parents who are calling their students under Mental Health for the majority of the year. They provide one note, expect that note to suffice for the entire year, and fight attendance letters, ineligibility for extracurriculars and sports, etc. How do you work with families who no longer care if their child stays home regularly, feel the right to call them out, but do not feel there should be consequences of any kind?

***RESPONSE:** Some mental health issues are long term. In this case, it is important to work with the parent or guardian to get the proper documentation of the health issue and assure that the child has the educational supports required by law in such a situation. If the mental health issue is not longer term, this could be a good opportunity to help them understand the academic and social emotional impact on their child when they miss school through an empathetic approach rather than a punitive one.*

- Parents have used COVID protocols as a reason to keep students home, specifically kindergarten students. How could we address this?

***RESPONSE:** This is another great example of why it is important to uncover root causes behind absences. Families could be keeping students home if there are any symptoms present because they feel it is safer or they could be unaware of changes in COVID protocols/guidelines. Unpacking reasons behind a student's absence allows you to address the deeper issue(s) that prevents them from showing up regularly. AttendanceWorks has put together a toolkit for communicating with students and families about why showing up to school matters. You can find the toolkit here: [Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L.](#)*

OTHER

- How do cultural implications about mental health impact attendance?

***RESPONSE:** Great question. Mental health is a brand new reason for absence and we are not aware of how schools are implementing it. Most districts have policies that require some sort of documentation from a provider after a certain number of consecutive days of illness, but it may not apply to mental health. The determination of the validity of the mental health excuse suffers the same biases that the determination of the physical health excuse does (e.g., diseases not recognized in mainstream U.S. culture, no access to a provider for documentation). It is important to note that in most cases, schools trust the parents to report on their child's health.*