

Chronic Absenteeism Bright Spots

Chronic absenteeism, especially among our youngest learners, is a higher priority than ever. Since the pandemic, rates of chronic absence jumped from 15% to over 40% of kindergartners statewide. With the increasing rates of chronic absenteeism, the Bright Spots initiative aims to uncover valuable systemic practices contributing to the broader effort of mitigating challenges posed by absenteeism in our education system.

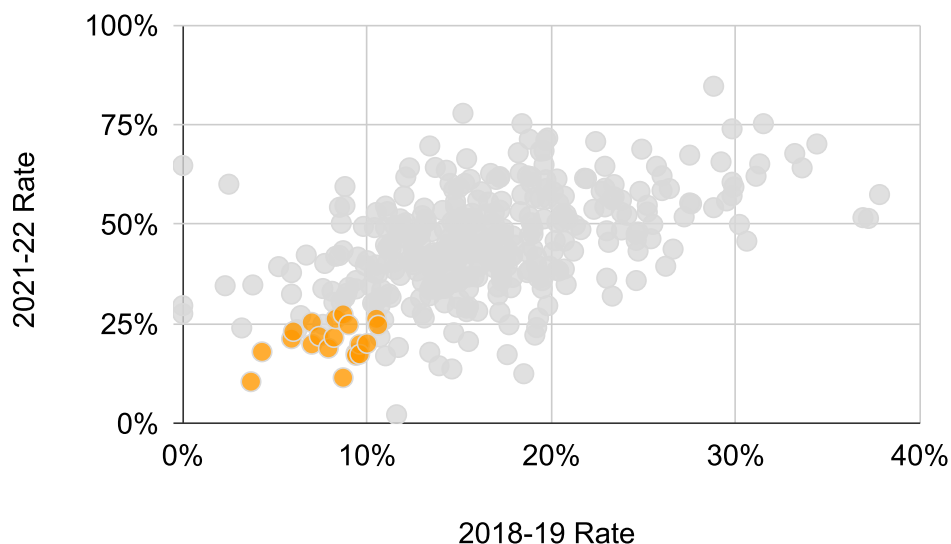
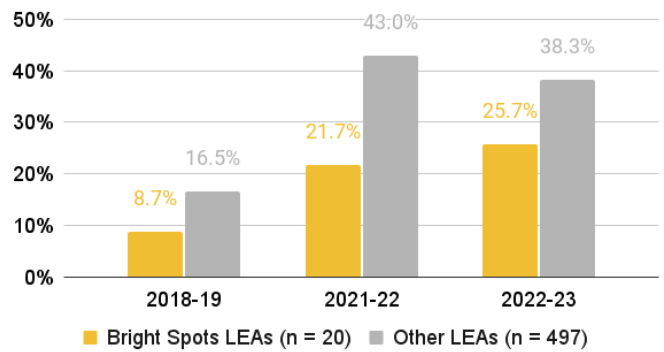
CCEE collaborated with AttendanceWorks and UC Davis in a research-practice partnership (RPP) to identify “bright spots” by analyzing statewide data; focusing on districts serving a large number of K-3 students with significant socio-economically disadvantaged student populations, yet **consistently lower chronic absenteeism rates compared to the statewide average** both before the pandemic and in 2022. **Twenty districts out of nearly 1,000 met these criteria.**

Identifying Bright Spot Districts

“Bright spot” districts were identified using publicly-available statewide chronic absenteeism data. Districts included in this analysis were those overall unduplicated pupil count of at least 40 percent and enrolled at least 100 Kindergarten students.

The 20 “bright spot” districts had significantly lower chronic absenteeism rates than the state average in 2018-19 and 2021-22 school years in Kindergarten and Grades 1-3, defined as having rates at least half a standard deviation below the state average pre- and post-pandemic. In addition, these districts outperformed the state across all grade spans.

Chronic Absenteeism Comparison - Total Average



Survey



The 20 “bright spot” districts were invited to participate in a survey to uncover information about the practices around attendance that might account for their success.

Key questions included:

- Policies on chronic absence prevention
- Communication strategies with families regarding attendance and health
- Access to health services
- Professional development on using data to reduce absences
- Perceived barriers to attendance
- The use of community events and technology for communication
- Partnerships or programs to support regular attendance

Site Visits



Out of the 20 districts, the team conducted site visits at three: Livingston Union School District, Cypress School District, and Kings Canyon Unified School District. The site visits allowed for an even deeper examination into systemic practices that could explain the consistent lower absenteeism rates.



During each site visit, the team conducted focus groups with district office staff, school site teams, principals, teachers, and parents. Additionally, the team observed drop-off and front desk activities related to attendance.

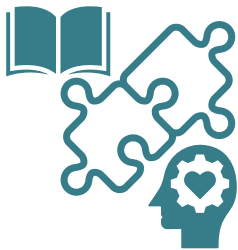
Data was collected on:

- **Aligning Vision with Attendance:** How do school practices and behaviors align with the District's vision and strategies regarding student attendance?
- **Ownership and Collaboration:** What do participants see as their role in making sure kids come to school? What efforts are made to engage all stakeholders, including principals, teachers/staff, and parents/caregivers, in supporting student attendance?
- **Communication:** How are attendance policies and resources communicated?
- **Reflections:** What reasons did participants attribute to their school's lower kindergarten chronic absence rate, and what tools or practices does the school use to track attendance and address absenteeism?

Key Themes



Intentional Focus on Building Trust and Engagement: Districts' emphasized the importance of a collaborative effort by all school staff to cultivate a trusting and engaging atmosphere. Schools achieved this through consistent communication, personalized outreach, and fostering strong relationships. The identified strategies included attendance incentives, collaboration with school staff and families, and creating a welcoming environment. Strategies and practices aim to ensure students feel valued and motivated to attend school regularly. Staff work collectively, sharing responsibility for student engagement and supporting each other to address attendance barriers.



Integrating Academic and Socioemotional Learning: Recognizing the critical link between academic success and socioemotional well-being, the schools implemented a variety of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices. Schools work to provide safe and supportive environments that reduce anxiety, promote empathy, and create a sense of belonging. Strategies include morning check-ins, SEL curriculum integration, and providing safe spaces for students to navigate their feelings. These initiatives help students feel connected and supported, thereby encouraging consistent attendance.



Creating and Ensuring Clear Supports for Health & Well-being: This theme highlights the essential role of health in maintaining regular school attendance. Schools offer comprehensive health services, and clear guidelines on health-related absences.. Effective communication ensures parents are informed and confident in the health and safety of the school environment. Health initiatives include access to health aides and nurses, health education, hygiene practices, and mental health resources. By addressing health concerns proactively, schools reduce health-related absences and support overall student well-being.