

SCUSD schools, students and community members are paying a high price for chronic absence. Across the district more than 1 in 10 enrolled students were chronically absent in the 2010-2011 school year. These rates vary — and in some cases are much higher — across particular populations, schools and neighborhoods.

This set of briefs highlights the issue of chronic absence in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). Chronically absent students are those missing at least 10% of school days in a school year. Unlike truancy, which is based only on “unexcused” absence, chronic absence rates account for all school absenteeism. We calculate chronic absence rates and describe their consequences for both chronically absent students and the district as a whole. In addition, we offer information about the chronically absent student population to inform critical next steps towards identifying and eliminating attendance barriers. The briefs were generated through the UC Davis Center for Regional Change¹ as part of a collaboration with SCUSD and Community Link, with the generous support of The California Endowment and Sierra Health Foundation.

SCUSD schools, students and community members are paying a high price for chronic absence. As a result of chronic absence, schools miss out on millions of dollars of funding each year, student learning is compromised, and broader social costs accrue. Across the district² more than 1 in 10 enrolled students, 5020 young people, were chronically absent or severely chronically absent in the 2010-2011 school year. These rates vary — and in some cases are much higher — across particular populations, schools and neighborhoods. However, focused partnerships amongst schools, families, community organizations and regional institutions hold potential to address this challenge.

This analysis employs widely-used numerical definitions of attendance patterns:

- **Satisfactory Attendance:** absent 0-4.9% time (up to 8.8 days in a 179 day school year)
- **Unsatisfactory Attendance:** absent 5.0-9.9% time (8.9-17.7 days in a 179 day school year)
- **Chronic Absence:** absent 10-14.9% time (17.9 to 26.7 days in a 179 day school year)
- **Severe Chronic Absence (or “Severely Absent”):** absent at least 15% time (at least 26.8 days in a 179 day school year).

Unless otherwise noted, throughout the briefs we report a combined chronic absence rate that reflects students with attendance records that qualify as “chronic” and “severely chronic”. Because recent district record-keeping transitions limited our analyses to 2010-2011 student attendance data, moving ahead it will be important to assess whether patterns described in these briefs hold true over time.

This compilation is organized as follows. Brief #1 describes the prevalence of chronic absence in SCUSD. Brief #2 assesses some of the costs of chronic absence. Brief #3 explores the characteristics of SCUSD’s chronically absent students, identifying populations, places and schools that appear to be important priorities. Finally Brief #4 recommends next steps that include: (1) get organized to use data effectively, (2) identify barriers to attendance, (3) build partnerships that eliminate attendance barriers, and (4) promote attendance. These steps comprise a framework for action, with detailed plans needing to emerge from a combination of local insights and lessons-learned from other schools and communities.

Endnotes:

¹Please direct questions about the brief to Dr. Nancy Erbstein, nerbstein@ucdavis.edu, 530-754-6913.

²For the purpose of this calculation we excluded attendance data for students in Grade 13 and with School code = “Home/Hospital; we were unable to include data for students attending John Morse Therapeutic Center.