

Chronic absenteeism—missing at least 10% of school days for any reason—is associated with a variety of poor learning, health and life outcomes. This brief follows up on earlier analyses¹ of 2010-2011 student attendance data to examine chronic absenteeism prevalence and trends in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD).

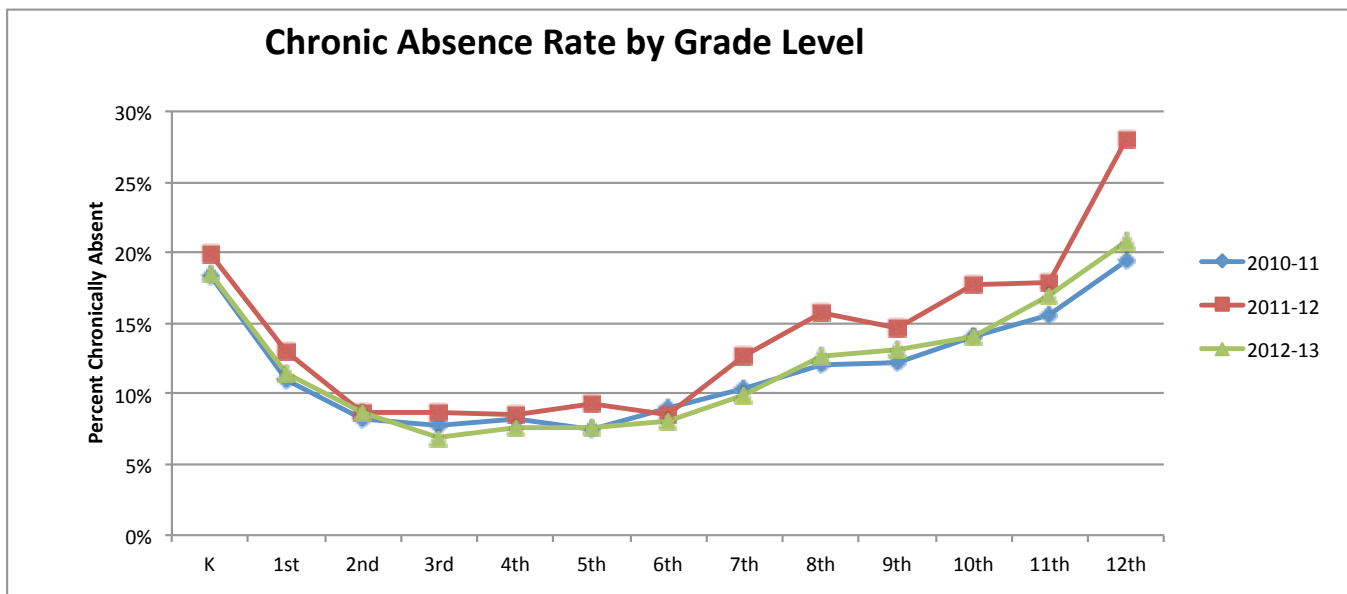
More than 1 in 10 students are chronically absent.

Across SCUSD,² overall chronic absence rates for the past three years have been 11.7% (2010-2011), 13.8% (2011-2012), and 11.8% (2012-2013).³ Therefore, chronic absenteeism appears to be a persistent challenge.

Grade level patterns of chronic absenteeism are fairly stable over time.

The overall pattern of chronic absenteeism across grade levels and chronic absence rates by grade level have remained fairly stable over this three-year period.

Figure 1: Chronic Absence Rate by Grade Level



In general, approximately one in five kindergarteners are chronically absent. Chronic absence rates decrease until third grade, and then increase again from sixth through twelfth grade. In 2011-2012, chronic absence rates were slightly elevated across grade levels, and especially high amongst high school seniors.

Footnotes:

¹Available at <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/publications/pub-keywords/chronic-absence>

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 and Yav Pem Suab Academy in any of the three years; in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 we were also unable to include data from Success Academy, Language Academy, The Academy, Capital City, and sites coded "Non-public school," and "Special Education Independent."

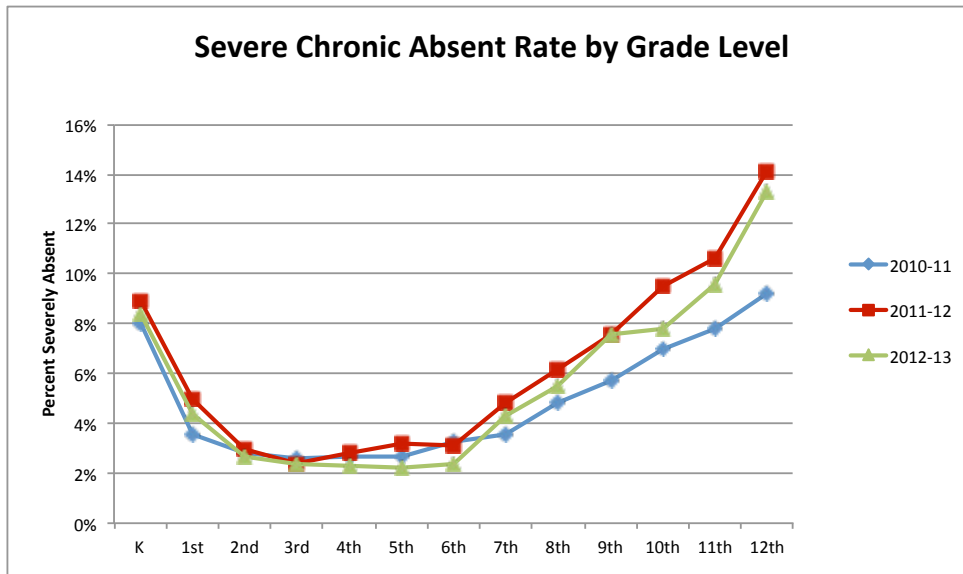
³Chronic absence rates reflect the percentage of students who missed at least 10% of the days they were enrolled in school. To assess chronic absence, we consider student absence rates, which are generated as follows: $\text{absence rate} = (\# \text{ days absent} / \# \text{ days enrolled}) \times 100\%$.

These calculations rely upon district-generated data on "# days absent" and "# days enrolled." According to district staff, in secondary schools where attendance is marked by period, "# days absent" is generated by counting every day's worth of periods a student is marked absent as the equivalent of one day absent. Primary school "tardies" are not counted as absences. We are unable to independently verify these analyses.

Severe chronic absenteeism (missing at least 15% of school) increases substantially through middle and high school, and increases more than lower levels of chronic absenteeism (missing 10-14.9% of school).

The proportion of chronically absent students missing more than 15% of school is relatively high in kindergarten compared with the other elementary and early middle grades, when it decreases to approximately 3%. However, through middle school and high school, not only does overall chronic absenteeism increase, but the proportion of these students that is severely chronically absent also increases.

Figure 2: Severe Chronic Absence Rate by Grade Level



Although district satisfactory attendance rates increased from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013, chronic absence rates remained similar.

Overall, the percentage of SCUSD students with “satisfactory” attendance (missing less than 5% of school) increased from 62.8% in 2011-2012 to 69.3% in 2012-2013. However, chronic absence rates remained similar, decreasing from 13.8% to 11.8%, during this time. This pattern raises questions about whether intervention strategies fostered the improved satisfactory attendance, and if so, whether alternatives might be required to reach students missing school at dangerously high rates.

In sum, preliminary analyses of student attendance data over three years suggest chronic absenteeism is an ongoing challenge. Grade level patterns were fairly consistent during this time period, with the highest chronic absence rates in kindergarten and twelfth grades; rates generally decrease through third grade, stabilize until sixth, and then begin increasing through middle and high school. Severely chronically absent students—those missing at least 15% of school—make up an increasingly greater proportion of chronic absentees throughout middle and high school. They also comprise a growing proportion of the chronically absent student population over the three year period. Additional data analyses will be released throughout the upcoming Spring and Summer of 2014.

SCUSD staff, families and community members are working hard to improve young people’s learning opportunities and outcomes. Ensuring that every student is able to regularly attend school should be a core element of these efforts.

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