

Alameda County Public Health Department
Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Project - DRAFT

Summary

There are clear links between chronic absenteeism and its contributing impact on the growing educational achievement gap. Research has shown that medical conditions contribute to school absenteeism. In a number of cities in the U.S., low-income students and students of color are disproportionately impacted by chronic absenteeism and truancy.

- The CDC estimates that 7.1 million children aged 0-17 years have asthma in the U.S., contributing to 10.5 million days of missed school days in 2008.
- Children do worse academically in 1st grade if they are chronically absent (absent 10% or more of school days) in kindergarten. Furthermore, chronic absenteeism is a proven early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout.
- Children living in poverty are 25% more likely than their peers living above the poverty line to miss three or more school days per month, often due to asthma, vision, dental, hearing, and other health problems.

Further examination of the nature of chronic absenteeism within Alameda County public schools will aid in determining appropriate preventive interventions and supports to improve the health and academic success of Alameda County school-aged children.

The goals of the Alameda County Public Health Department's Chronic Absenteeism Project are to determine the extent of chronic absenteeism due to chronic illness, identify gaps in service linkages and provide recommendations in order to reduce absenteeism, particularly in the early grades. In an initial program phase, ACPHD, in collaboration with community partners, agencies, and programs, will partner with one or two school districts that are ready to determine the extent of the chronic absenteeism issue, identify the most vulnerable populations and schools in the early elementary grades, and explore best practices, strategies and future interventions with the greatest potential for improving childhood health and decreasing absenteeism rates. Findings from this initial program phase will result in recommendations for further partnerships, interventions, infrastructure needs, and how to address service gaps, and will provide implications for replication in additional Alameda County public school districts.

School district participation in the first phase of the project will be evaluated for immediate readiness in terms of:

- Attendance tracking capabilities (existing human resources, existing attendance tracking protocols, and technological systems in place)
- Existing attendance data by school and associated geographic area
- Documented chronic absenteeism challenges in school district and communities
- Support from District Administration for focused attendance assessment

District with greatest level of readiness for Phase 1: Oakland Unified School District

Other Districts with possible readiness for Phase 1 or subsequent replication efforts: San Lorenzo USD, Hayward USD

Key Research Questions

- Which elementary schools and associated geographic areas are facing the highest numbers of absenteeism and chronic absenteeism?
- What are the institutional resources and limitations in addressing chronic absenteeism in neighborhoods, schools, and school districts as a whole?
- What are the health factors contributing to chronic absenteeism in Alameda County public schools, particularly in the early elementary grades?
- What are the health service resources already available?
- Given the challenges and assets, what early interventions or services or infrastructure can be implemented to address chronic absenteeism?