



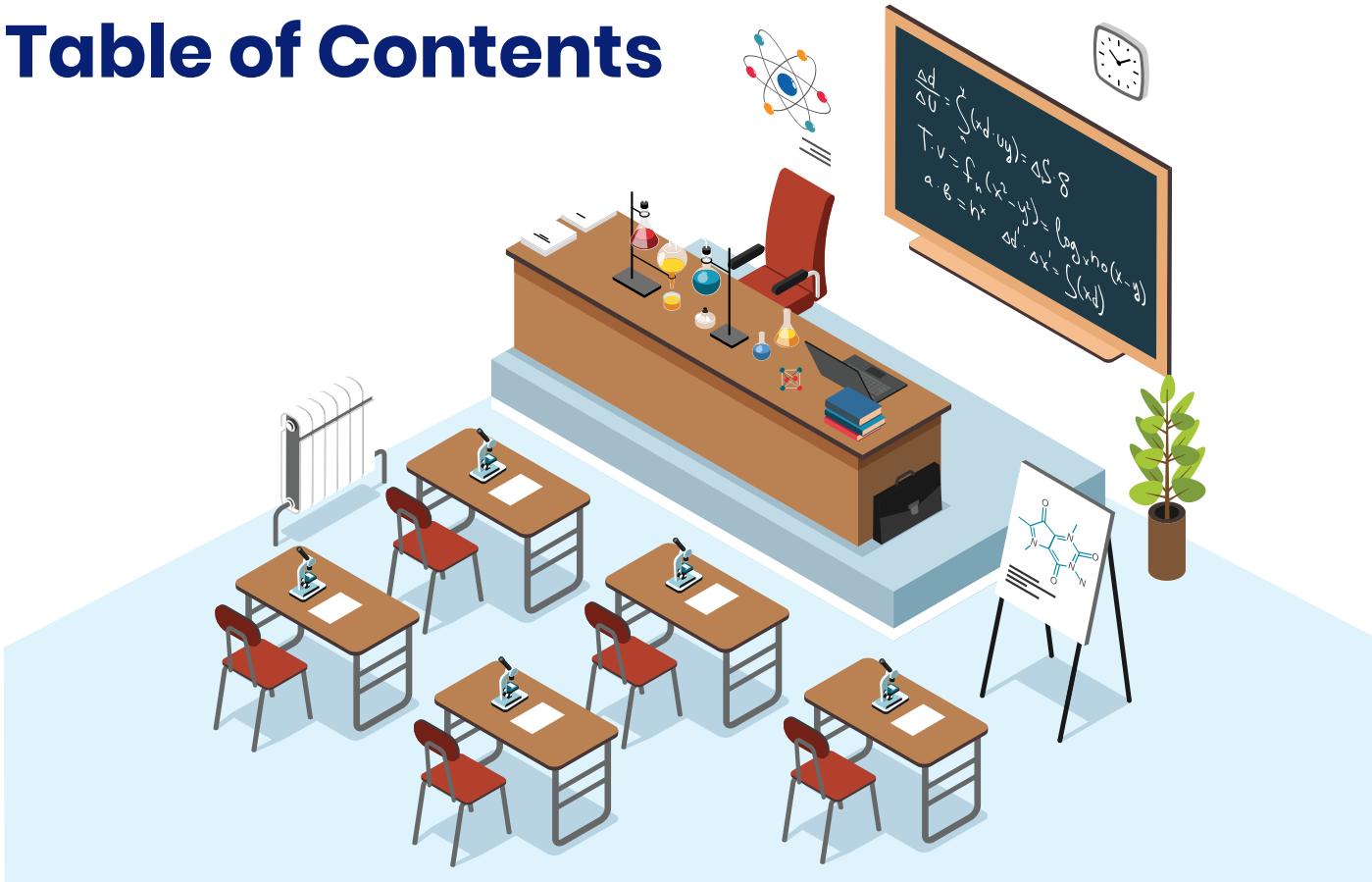
ImpactLA

Volume 1 | Issue 3 A LOS ANGELES UNIFIED RESEARCH PUBLICATION

Schools Supporting Student Attendance On and Off Campus



Table of Contents





THESE ARE DIFFICULT DAYS FOR OUR FAMILIES AND OUR SCHOOLS.

Many people have lost their homes and still more have lost their jobs due to the fires. Some of our immigrant students may fear being away from their parents. And through this all, our teachers and other school staff stand tall even when some are suffering themselves. We appreciate the extra support you offer our students and their families every day. We know you go out of your way to help them, and we applaud you for it. **THANK YOU!**



Students Who Miss More School Perform Lower in English Language Arts and Math

By: Dr. Timi Farkas, Program Evaluation & Research Coordinator, Strategic Data and Evaluation Branch (SD&E), and Dr. William Johnston, Senior Executive Director of Strategy, Division of Data, Strategy and Innovation.

When you know, you know! Decades of research confirm what all educators understand: *students who show up to class do better than those who do not.* Missing school is detrimental to student success. The link between absences and performance is present in the earliest grades as well. Research conducted on a nationally representative sample of kindergarten students shows that kindergarteners who were chronically absent had lower math and reading outcomes, as well as lower educational and social engagement than their peers who attended more days.

In our District, school attendance has a meaningful relationship with English Language Arts (ELA)



and math performance. The Office of Data and Accountability compared the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) performance of students who missed more days of school to students who missed fewer days in the 2023-24 school year.

Students Who Miss More School Perform Lower in ELA and Math

The students had similar background characteristics (race/ethnicity, EL status, student with disabilities status, low-income status) and they had performed similarly on the SBA the previous year. **Students who missed 9 more days than their peers, on average, performed almost 5 points lower on both the SBA ELA and SBA math in 2023-24. This means that even missing about 2 days of school could be related to a 1-point drop in SBA performance.** This finding was present for both elementary and middle school students.

Not only does showing up to class matter, students carry with them for years the negative consequences of missing school. There is evidence that the effects of school absence accumulate across years: students who are frequently absent over the course of elementary school tend to show worse long-term academic and social-emotional outcomes than their peers with higher attendance.

Taken together, this evidence from both inside and outside of LAUSD suggests that [increasing attendance is a powerful lever for increasing student achievement](#). However, disruptions in social practices and family life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly mandatory closures, continue to impact our schools. The number of chronically absent students in the District (those who missed 18 or more days in a year) nearly doubled after the pandemic. In the year before the pandemic (2018-19), roughly a quarter (24%) of our students were chronically absent. Two years later, more than a third (42%) of our students missed 18 or more days of instruction when they returned to in-person learning by 2021-22.

Fortunately, the hard work of school and District teams is paying off, and there has been a steady decline in chronic absenteeism over the past few years. Continuing the push to increase student attendance will help absenteeism levels decline to pre-pandemic levels (and hopefully even lower) and is likely to improve student academic success.



Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

By: Britney Wise, Senior Educational Research Analyst, SD&E, Elsy Rosado, Administrator, Student Support and Attendance Services, and Carrie Watson, Professional Expert, SD&E

Chronic absenteeism often reflects a range of systemic challenges faced by many young people today. No single factor can be pinpointed as the sole cause; instead, we can understand the issue better through the lens of psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which illustrates the various levels of an individual's environment that shape their development: from their immediate

Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

home life to broader societal influences, such as public infrastructure (see Figure 1). LAUSD has adopted this perspective to better identify and analyze the factors that impact student attendance and define effective strategies to support students and reduce chronic absenteeism.

The Strategic Data and Evaluation Branch interviewed 50 school site staff across the District during the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years to understand how different levels of LAUSD students' environments influence their attendance. The most common factors impacting student attendance identified in the study fall into one of four categories: barriers, aversions, disengagement, or misconceptions.

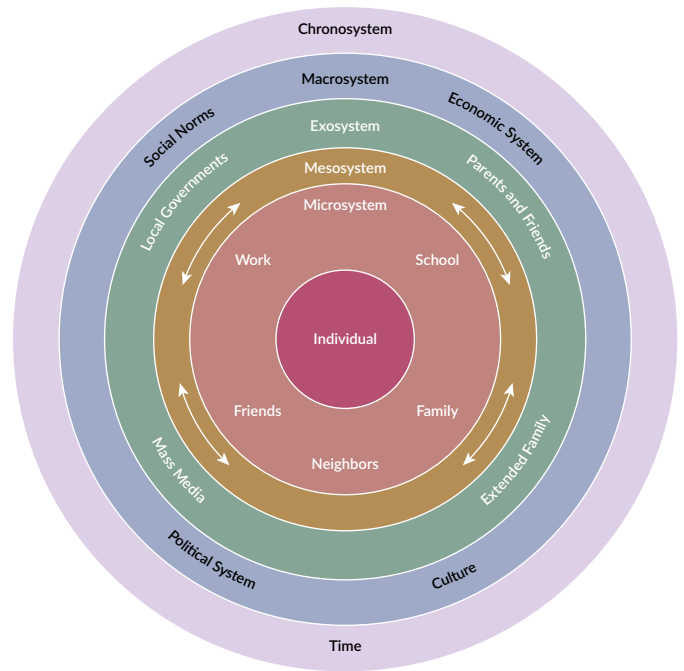


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Barriers to attendance are logistical factors that prevent students from attending school. Among the various barriers identified, most school staff pointed to a lack of resources as a common reason for student absences, citing parental job insecurity, unreliable transportation, and unstable housing, which impact students' ability to attend school regularly. One pupil service and attendance (PSA) counselor stated:

“ Our homeless youth having to worry about where they're [going to] sleep tonight adds a lot to school not really being a priority... We encountered a recent case where a student had until this Wednesday, before their hotel voucher was up, and they had no idea where they were going to head next. So, dealing with ... stressful situations ... really do come into play with attendance as well, because sometimes they have to leave town or head somewhere else, and it prevents them from coming to school. ”

– PSA counselor, High School Region East

Other barriers identified included physical illness, adult-like responsibilities (e.g., students who have jobs), and [exposure to trauma](#), such as divorce or neighborhood violence.

Aversions to attendance are factors that cause students to avoid school because they feel unsafe or unwelcome. According to school staff, one of the most significant aversions that LAUSD students face is related to [mental health challenges](#). This includes internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) and externalizing (e.g., hostility and aggression) mental health problems. One psychiatric social worker (PSW) explained:

“ When I speak to students . . . [about] their absences, it's [often] anxiety. They're either experiencing somatic symptoms, like the stomachaches [or] the headaches . . . it's because they [might be] anxious and that might be because there's stuff going on at home . . . or they're having trouble here academically. It's a lot of different reasons. ”

– PSW, Middle School Region West

Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

Other aversions identified included concerns about school safety and a lack of social connectedness.

Disengagement factors negatively influence students' desire to attend school. Common disengagement factors include minimal [involvement in extracurricular activities](#) or enriching course options, increased interest in activities outside of school, and lack of positive staff-student relationships. One A-G counselor noted:

“ I know the [main reason for absence is] that the student doesn't want to come, and because the parent is lenient, or the parent is working [they don't] even notice that the student is at home until we make that phone call. Then they're like, 'No, [my student] went to school' and it's like, 'No, they're at home.' ...I want to say that's the majority of our students. ”

– PSA counselor, High School Region East

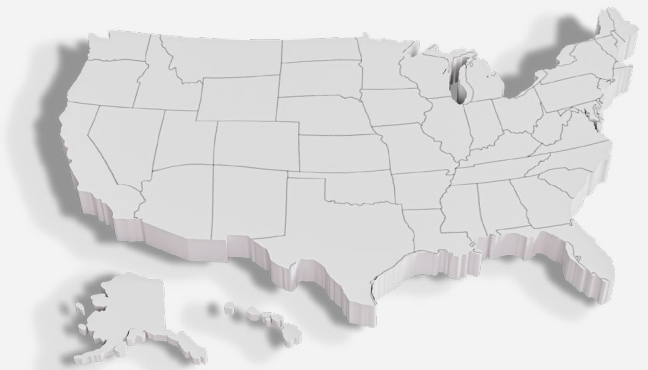
Misconceptions refer to the inaccurate opinions that students or families have about school attendance. PSA counselors indicated that the poor understanding of the compulsory education law is the most common misconception about attendance held by L.A. Unified families. One PSA counselor explained:

“ I think that one of the root causes [of chronic absence] is that parents may not be aware that there is a law that governs child welfare and attendance. ... So, some of the parents don't really understand that it is the law and that they must be in school. Sometimes we see parents taking students on vacation. ”

– PSA counselor, Elementary School Region East

Absenteeism Slowing Post-Pandemic Academic Recovery Across the Country

[A recent study on academic recovery](#) assessed district-level changes in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores between 2019 and 2024 for approximately 35 million students from 43 states. Findings indicate that, as of Spring 2024, the average U.S. student remained nearly half a grade level behind pre-pandemic achievement in both math and reading. Most districts—high- and low-income—have seen a rise in student absenteeism, but low-income districts experience greater percentages. Not surprisingly, districts with high post-pandemic absenteeism experience slower recovery. The report recommends that mayors, employers, and other community leaders join schools in tackling student absenteeism.





LAUSD Attendance Support Strategies

By: Elsy Rosado, Administrator, Student Support and Attendance Services, Britney Wise, Senior Educational Research Analyst, SD&E, and Carrie Watson, Professional Expert, SD&E

LAUSD Attendance Support Strategies

We have seen that chronic absenteeism is a complex issue with various co-occurring factors, making it challenging to address. School districts across the country have adopted a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model to improve their provision of services to students and, particularly, abate root causes of chronic absenteeism. MTSS is a three-tiered educational framework that provides different levels of support based on the severity of absenteeism, addressing the diverse needs of students and families.

Interviews with school staff highlighted how LAUSD acknowledges the multifaceted nature of chronic absenteeism and has implemented strategies aligned with the MTSS model.

The District’s **universal prevention strategies** support all students, including monitoring data to identify those struggling with attendance. PSA counselors indicated that monitoring involves [verifying data on District systems](#), such as Focus or MiSiS, to spot attendance issues. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of [teacher collaboration in this process](#). One PSA counselor noted:

“ [M]ost of the time it’s going to be the teacher [who notices emerging attendance problems first]. Sometimes [teachers] alert me [to an issue] when they say, “Hey, so-and-so hasn’t been here in a whole week.” Somebody told me that yesterday. So, I came back down here, and I called [home]. ”

– PSA counselor, Elementary School Region East

Tier 3

Is for students that are chronically absent and includes more intensive support.

Tier 2

Targets students with mild-to-moderate attendance issues through personalized outreach.

Tier 1

Involves universal strategies, such as promoting a positive school environment.

LAUSD Attendance Support Strategies

Another strategy mentioned involves organizing activities or events that promote attendance to develop an intrinsic motivation for students to come to school. These initiatives are crucial for fostering a positive school climate, helping students connect with the school and creating a welcoming environment. As one counselor explained:

[M]ost of my time is [spent]...creating our events for our milestone days to try to get [students] to be interested in school... I try to be as universal as possible in the middle school...where we're just celebrating school to get everybody excited that they're at school so that they can [have] something to talk about when they go home.

- PSA counselor, Middle School Region West

The District's **targeted intervention strategies** focus on outreach to [build rapport with families](#). This includes [contacting families](#) via letters, phone calls, and home visits to uncover the root causes of absences. Schools are implementing targeted interventions such as student check-ins, [group counseling](#) services, and [parent workshops](#) to tackle what prevents students from attending school.



[When you establish relationships with parents], then you get the root cause of the issue...I think the key is . . . relationship building.

-PSA counselor, Elementary School Region East

The District's **intensive strategies** involve more intensive interventions for students and families who continue to struggle with attendance despite universal and targeted interventions. This includes engaging the School Attendance Review Team (SART) and the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) in cases of severe chronic absenteeism.

"We're partnered with the City Attorney's office. So, usually that brings an added level of support when [families] see information from the City Attorney's office. They take it more seriously versus just the school asking them for a meeting." - PSA counselor, Middle School Region South

The District has actively pursued its goal of promoting outstanding attendance and supporting in-class learning for students. Findings from SD&E's attendance studies also offer actionable insights to further support these efforts. The experiences of LAUSD school staff, as well as existing attendance research, stress the important [role school leaders play in shaping the attendance culture on their campus](#). Many school staff shared that when school leadership

present a unified front to address absenteeism, emphasizing that [improving attendance is a shared responsibility among all staff, then communication with students and families](#) is streamlined and attendance expectations are clear. Interview data suggest school leaders can do two things to promote a shared responsibility among school staff to improve attendance:

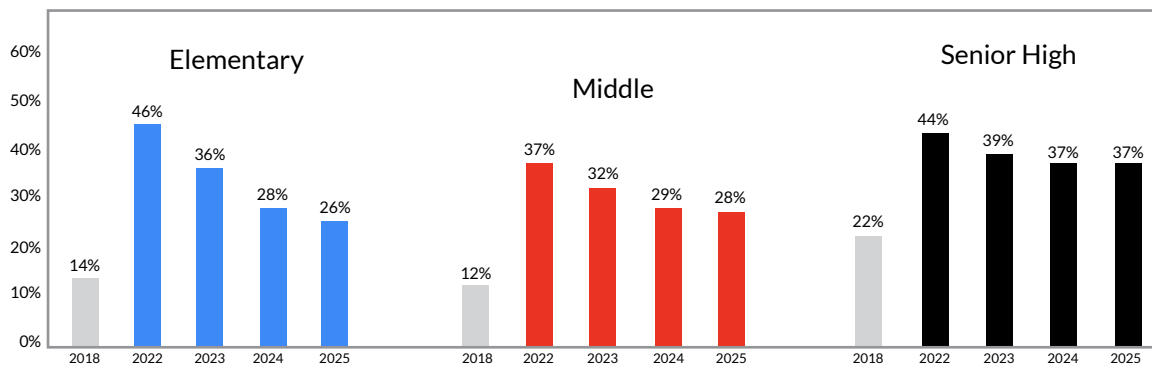
1. School leaders can set expectations for staff to integrate attendance data into existing meetings (e.g., all staff meetings) and structures for conversations with instructional staff and students (e.g., data chats with teachers or parent-teacher conferences).
2. [School leaders can encourage all school staff](#), such as office, support, and instructional staff, to help with attendance work. For example, support and instructional staff can reach out to students and families when they notice attendance problems emerge, thereby leveraging existing relationships to reengage those students, and office staff can take on administrative attendance tasks such as clearing absences.

What is driving the reduction in chronic absenteeism at LAUSD?

By: Elsy Rosado, Administrator, Student Support and Attendance Services, Britney Wise, Senior Educational Research Analyst, ORPE, and Carrie Watson, Professional Expert, ORPE

The COVID-19 pandemic made the root causes of chronic absenteeism more visible than ever. In response, District leaders and community partners introduced multi-tiered monitoring and support systems to re-engage students, provide resources to school teams, and strengthen a genuine school-wide culture of attendance. The strategy paid off. LAUSD has reduced chronic absenteeism over the past three academic cycles.

Percent of Chronic Absenteeism in LAUSD Schools (by Year and Level)



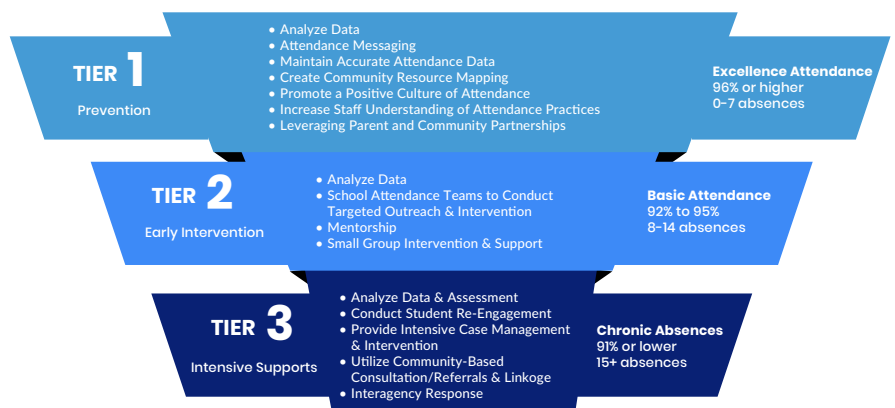
Source: Student Support and Attendance Services

The iAttend framework drives the culture of attendance through universal practices and intensive, individualized supports, including tracking, targeted outreach, home visits, and resource provision on a student-by-student basis. Students know they are seen and valued at their school, and adults understand everyone plays a role in motivating students to show up by cultivating relationships, trust, and student belonging.



Central office staff reinforce school site efforts by consistently offering principals data and tools grounded in evidence-based practices, such as forecasts for seasonal dips in attendance. Similarly, District families have access to resources related to virtual school options, transportation, immigration, health, wellness or housing. The team remains optimistic about continued progress, especially because the newly created Student Attendance Advisory Council opens up a space for students to reflect on what helps them to remain engaged in school.

A Multi-Tiered System of Services and Supports for School Attendance





Share Your Thoughts



www.lausd.org/ImpactLA