

Leveraging Chronic Absence Data to Inform Decision Making by the Healthcare and Public Health Sectors

Current trends in policy and practice have created important opportunities to bring the health and education sectors together. Chronic absenteeism data can be a powerful tool for healthcare and public health decision making, and leveraging the power of that data allows healthcare and public health stakeholders to play an important role in ensuring that students are in school, healthy and ready to learn.

Chronic absence has many causes. Common health-related causes include:

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Influenza
- Mental health, anxiety, and trauma
- Obesity issues
- Oral health
- Seizure disorders
- Vision problems
- Family health issues

Strategic Recommendations

Support a culture of attendance through positive engagement, caring relationships and effective messaging on health and attendance. Ask about absences at well-child visits, praise good attendance and provide clear guides for when a sick child should stay home.

Build capacity of school districts, schools and parents to address health-related causes of chronic absence. Support families of children with chronic health issues through the action plan process at their school. Update state Medicaid policies and billing guides to expand what health services can be reimbursed by Medicaid.

Promote access to actionable data, and data collaboration between the healthcare, public health and education sectors. Integrate chronic absence data into local public health systems and overlay it with chronic disease data to better understand potential root causes of chronic absence.

Support shared accountability across healthcare, public health and education, and between state and local stakeholders. Incorporate chronic absence and other education-oriented social determinants of health as priorities in state Medicaid Managed Care contracts. Incorporate chronic absenteeism into Community Health Needs Assessments and public health assessment and improvement planning.

Catalyze strategic partnerships between key players, and build meaningful partnerships. Look at the available data, determine the leading health issues and bring together partners to address the identified needs.

Challenges

- Data limitations, for example, attendance data often doesn't include the reasons for absences
- Data sharing barriers, such as Issues with FERPA and HIPAA and systems interoperability issues.
- Professional capacity barriers, including "metric fatigue" and "metric mismatch."
- Partnership barriers, such as navigating bureaucracies and lingo across sectors.

Download a full report, including expanded recommendations and resources, below. For questions or to discuss this issue, contact Alex Mays, Senior National Program Director, at alex@healthyschoolscampaign.org.

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