Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Lessons From Community Schools

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Executive Summary

Educators, policymakers, and families share concerns about the significant decline in school attendance since the onset of pandemic-induced school closures. According to a 2023 report, the national rate of chronically absent students—those missing 10% or more of school days—nearly doubled from 2018 to 2022, reaching 28%. Although attendance has started to improve in some states, chronic absenteeism remains 75% higher, on average, than prepandemic levels. California mirrors this trend, with chronic absenteeism rising to 30% in 2022 before decreasing to 25% in 2023, still well above prepandemic levels.

When students miss school, they lose opportunities for learning and social interaction as well as access to critical services. Research shows that chronically absent students are more likely to fall behind academically, disengage socially, and drop out of school altogether. Because absenteeism is strongly associated with these important student outcomes, it is crucial that policymakers, educators, and researchers identify effective strategies to alleviate it.

Community schools have emerged as a promising approach to mitigate chronic absenteeism, as they are adept at organizing supports for students and families and creating conditions for rich learning and well-being. Support and funding for community schools has increased in recent years at both the federal and state level. California has become a leader in implementation in recent years, supported by an unprecedented $4.1 billion investment through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. The program provides grants that enable school and district partnerships with community agencies and local government to support students' academic, physical, and mental development.

This report examines how four California community schools—Buena Vista Horace Mann, Elk Hills Elementary, Helen Keller Elementary, and Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary—significantly reduced their chronic absenteeism rates postpandemic. Drawing on interviews with school leaders and personnel, it highlights proactive and interventionist attendance strategies that have enabled these schools to reduce chronic absenteeism. Insights from these efforts can guide educators and policymakers nationwide in addressing attendance challenges effectively.

Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

The featured community schools use comprehensive, holistic approaches aimed at creating a culture of support to combat chronic absenteeism. Key strategies include:

- **Improving Family Engagement**. The selected schools utilized several strategies to build relationships with families and engage them in attendance efforts, including phone calls and texts for unexcused absences, outreach campaigns focused on the importance of consistent attendance, and home visits to connect students and families with needed resources. These strategies were crucial in supporting families to recalibrate attendance expectations, which were disrupted during the pandemic.

- **Increasing Student Connectedness.** The featured community schools prioritize student connectedness to school through relationship-building and enrichment opportunities that promote students' enthusiasm for school attendance. These include advisory groups, mentorship programs, and a wide range of extracurricular activities that incorporate student interests and facilitate friendships between students and their peers.

- **Systematically Tracking and Analyzing Data.** Community schools included in this report have developed consistent systems for collecting, tracking, and analyzing attendance data. These systems help school staff to examine attendance patterns, identify students nearing or exceeding the chronic absenteeism threshold, and develop targeted supports and intervention strategies

- **Utilizing Tiered Systems of Support.** The selected community schools leverage differentiated strategies to support student attendance. These include universal strategies like attendance incentives and relationship-building opportunities, as well as targeted interventions such as home visits and referrals to community resources for students who need more intensive support.

- **Leveraging Partnerships.** Partnerships with external organizations are critical for addressing specific attendance barriers. Community schools included in this report utilize partnerships to provide services like housing support, before- and after-school programming, and mental health services.

- **Deploying Community School Coordinators.** Comprehensively addressing barriers to school attendance is time-intensive and skilled work. In the featured community schools, community school coordinators play a pivotal role in identifying attendance challenges and implementing strategies to promote attendance, from data analysis to family engagement and partnership management. They are essential to building cohesive systems that effectively address the unique needs of students and families.

Key Takeaways for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

The strategies above demonstrate key learnings about effective approaches to increasing school attendance:

- **Proactive and Preventive Approaches.** Rather than waiting for problems to arise, the community schools included in this report proactively engage families and students by sharing the importance of consistent attendance and information about students' attendance data. They also focus on building family relationships and nurturing a sense of connection, making community schools places where students and families want to be.

- **Trusting Relationships.** By building trusting relationships with students and families and partnering with them to problem-solve attendance barriers together, the featured community schools adopt a restorative approach rather than a punitive approach, which might involve disciplinary actions such as employing truant officers or taking legal action against parents.

- **Systematic Data Utilization.** Utilizing robust data systems, the selected community schools identify underlying causes of absenteeism and develop targeted interventions. By leveraging a tiered system of supports, the schools offer a coherent approach to supporting attendance that builds upon their approach to addressing challenges in other areas.

- **Dedicated Capacity.** The range of challenges that contribute to chronic absenteeism necessitate additional capacity to address attendance barriers. Community school coordinators can play a key role on attendance teams, spearhead family engagement, manage external partnerships, and coordinate support services, ensuring a comprehensive approach to attendance improvement.

- **Collaboration.** Collaboration among administrators, school support teams, and community school coordinators helped schools meet student and family attendance challenges. The principals at these sites, in particular, engaged in a collaborative leadership approach that provided coordinators the support and flexibility to take this on.

- **Systems-Level Support.** The featured community schools are part of community school initiatives receiving state funding through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The CCSPP prioritizes many of the strategies identified in this report, such as implementing a tiered approach to intervention and engaging community partners. The districts in which the featured community schools are located provide support for participating schools that aligns with the community schools approach. This systemic context reinforces the work of individual schools, allowing them to expand their efforts rather than battling against a misaligned system.

Introduction

Educators, policymakers, and families share concerns about the dramatic drop in school attendance that has persisted since the onset of pandemic-induced school closures. A 2024 report shows that the rate of students who were chronically absent—youth missing 10% or more of school days (including excused and unexcused absences)—nearly doubled from 2018 to 2022 nationwide, from 15% to 28%.[1] While the report shows that attendance has started to rebound in many states, it indicates that the average chronic absenteeism rate remains 75% higher than prepandemic levels. Chronic absenteeism in California mirrors the national trend, up from 11% in 2018 to 30% in 2022, then dropping to 25% in 2023—still far above prepandemic levels.[2]

When a student is absent from school, they miss out on opportunities to learn, socialize with peers and adults, and receive services critical to their development. Research demonstrates that students who are chronically absent are more likely to fall behind academically, disengage socially, and drop out of school altogether.[3] Indeed, the rise in chronic absenteeism occurred in tandem with significant national declines in achievement.[4] Taken together, the evidence suggests that addressing chronic absenteeism is critical for the success of any efforts aimed at reducing the opportunity gap, improving academic achievement and graduation rates, and helping students access the long-term social and cognitive benefits of school.

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To address this pressing concern, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers are examining both the causes of chronic absenteeism and promising strategies to combat it. Chronic absenteeism is highest in school districts serving students and families from low-income backgrounds,[5] where many encounter transportation challenges, housing insecurity, inadequate access to health care, and community violence that can contribute to inconsistent school attendance.[6]

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing attendance barriers and contributed to new ones, requiring substantial absences for many students.[7] Even as the pandemic has subsided, COVID-19 surges, along with widespread exposure to RSV and other viruses, have kept many students out of school for more days than was common in the past. The pandemic also worsened staffing shortages,[8] hindering schools' capacity to identify students who need support and connect them with resources to improve their well-being and their attendance. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the pandemic, rates of depression and anxiety have skyrocketed for young people, creating an additional barrier to consistent school attendance.[9]

Climate events have also contributed to attendance challenges. More intense and frequent storms, floods, and wildfires have, at times, closed schools and made roads impassable in many places, adding to the number of student absences. In California, for example, the 2022–23 school year featured more than 1,000 emergency events that prevented students from attending school.[10]

Regardless of the reason for absence, missing school affects students' learning progress, their attachment to school, and their mental health. With the range of factors that can contribute to chronic absenteeism, researchers point to the need for multifaceted strategies to increase attendance, including offering support to students and families in locally and contextually relevant ways.[11]

Community schools have emerged as a promising strategy to combat chronic absenteeism, as they organize supports for students and families and work to create conditions for rich learning and well-being. (See What Does It Mean to Be a Community School?) Support and funding for community schools has increased in recent years at both the federal and state level,[12] in part due to schools' responses to local needs during the pandemic.[13] California has become a leader in implementation in recent years, supported by an unprecedented $4.1 billion investment through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The program provides grants that enable school and district partnerships with community agencies and local government to support students' academic, physical, and mental development. Technical assistance is also a key programmatic element.

What Does It Mean to Be a Community School?

Community schools organize in- and out-of-school resources and supports such as mental health services, meals, health care, tutoring, internships, and other learning and career opportunities that are tailored to the goals and needs of students and families. They also cultivate a welcoming and safe school environment and provide instruction that invites students' multifaceted identities and backgrounds into the classroom to support rich and inclusive learning. This whole-school strategy brings educators, local community members, families, and students together to make collaborative decisions; prioritize student learning, well-being, and engagement; and turn schools into community hubs.

While community schools adopt different structures and practices depending on the needs and assets of the school and surrounding community, they often share common site-level practices. These include: (1) expanded, enriched learning opportunities; (2) rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction; (3) a culture of belonging, safety, and care; (4) integrated systems of support; (5) powerful student and family engagement; and (6) collaborative leadership and shared power and voice. These whole child practices are best implemented when there is a shared vision and purpose, trusting relationships are formed between members of the school community, and decision-making is both data-informed and inclusive.

Community school coordinators and other specialized personnel are commonly central figures in community schools who support and manage the integration of these school features.

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Framework: Essentials for community school transformation*.

Community schools implement supports that can address attendance barriers, such as increased access to health services, meals, and before- and after-school programming, among others. They also seek to create welcoming and asset-based learning environments, drawing on community connections for the curriculum as well as approaches that increase student engagement and sense of belonging, which can influence absenteeism. With these structures and approaches in place, community schools implement proactive and interventionist measures to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism. In doing so, they promote a shift from blaming students and families for attendance challenges to engaging in problem-solving and collective action that address students' and families' personalized needs.

This report considers how some California community schools have dramatically reduced their chronic absenteeism rates postpandemic. Its driving research question is: What whole-school approaches and processes have state-supported community schools used to effectively identify and respond to attendance challenges?

It investigates this question with a qualitative study of four elementary or K–8 community schools that are supported by CCSPP grants, have shown growth along various outcomes, are geographically diverse, and are located in districts that have implemented the community schools strategy for several years. During data collection for three broader case studies and a profile of community schools, these four schools emerged as particularly successful at reducing chronic absenteeism. The findings are drawn from published research and eight individual or focus-group interviews with site leaders and community school personnel—key figures who were purposefully recruited based on their roles in implementing the community schools model and connecting students and families with holistic supports—to understand how the schools have enacted approaches to mitigate chronic absenteeism. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes.

Findings suggest that the four schools embraced common approaches to increasing consistent attendance. Principals and community school personnel across the sites described their keen focus on relationship-building with students and families to cultivate healthy school attachments that promote consistent attendance. They also pointed to processes and structures that enabled systematic data tracking, the use of tiered systems of support, and community partnerships as critical to identifying interventions that can support increased attendance at each site. Community school coordinators lent critical capacity in these efforts, yet consistent collaboration among coordinators, school leaders, and other staff was a central feature in each site's approach to stemming chronic absenteeism. Lessons learned from community school efforts to address chronic absenteeism can inform the work of educators and policymakers in California and across the nation.

Four Community Schools Meeting the Attendance Challenge

While emerging data indicate that attendance is incrementally improving in many districts and counties across California, it remains troublingly low when compared to prepandemic rates.[14] This report examines how four California elementary or K–8 community schools have made substantial gains in alleviating chronic absenteeism and in closing the gap between prepandemic and postpandemic rates. (See Table 1 for the schools' chronic absenteeism data.)

The community schools at the center of this report span the state and differ in district size and geography. Despite their contextual differences, they each primarily serve low-income communities. Schools in these communities typically experience higher absenteeism than the state as a whole and their home county. These communities were also disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, experiencing particularly large surges during the pandemic as well as greater rates of illness, unemployment, dislocation, eviction, and mortality.[15] Accordingly, these schools experienced greater levels of chronic absenteeism.[16] Data indicate that the featured community schools, like other schools in under-resourced communities, have faced sharp rises in chronic absenteeism in the wake of the pandemic and yet have made great strides in addressing this urgent challenge in their school settings. (See Figure 1.)

Before describing the common approaches the community schools have used to increase daily attendance, we provide a brief description of their community school models and the systems-level support they receive to implement their approaches.

Figure 1. Chronic Absenteeism in California and Profiled Community Schools
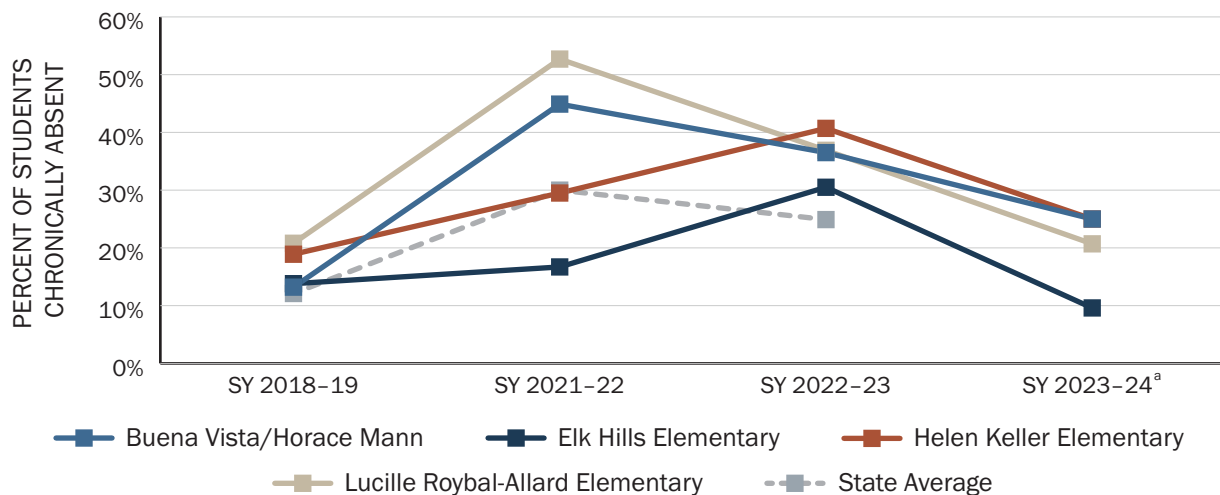
[a] Self-reported data for the 2023–24 school year (SY), since publicly available California Department of Education (CDE) data were not available at the time of publication. However, schools' self-reported data are the same data that will be reported by the CDE.

Note: As a result of the statewide school closures that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE determined that absenteeism data for the 2019–20 school year were invalid and unreliable and thus did not release them to the public. In addition, the CDE notes that the widespread implementation of distance learning affected attendance data during the 2020–21 school year. For these reasons, data from those 2 years are omitted from the table.

Source: California Department of Education. DataQuest [Data set].

Buena Vista Horace Mann

Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8 Community School (Buena Vista Horace Mann) is a K–8, Spanish dual immersion, community school in the Mission District of San Francisco. In the 2023–24 academic year, the school served just under 600 students, approximately 62% of whom were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Eighty-eight percent of its students identified as Latinx, 58% were English learners, 16.4% were designated as students with disabilities, and 4.3% were experiencing homelessness.

While Buena Vista Horace Mann has embraced community school strategies for a decade, recent state and local funding has bolstered its whole child educational approach. These include a first-round California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grant, which funds the community school coordinator,[17] the on-site therapist, and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, which supports summer school and after-school enrichment programs. In addition to these state funding sources, Buena Vista Horace Mann also receives funding support from local sources like the Beacon Initiative, which enables the school to have an on-site Beacon director, and a partnership with the Jamestown Community Center, which provides a before-school program and after-school programming (at no cost to families) with academic tutoring and enrichment.

By blending various state and local funding sources and developing a dynamic network of community partners, Buena Vista Horace Mann provides systems of support that holistically address the needs of its students. It offers extensive basic needs, health, and wellness resources to students and families, including on-site behavioral and mental health services and a stay-over program for families experiencing homelessness, which supports stability and safety. Buena Vista Horace Mann has also implemented structures that allow students and families to be well known, including a family resource center, small class sizes, and a middle school advisory program that meets four times per week.

> By blending various state and local funding sources and developing a dynamic network of community partners, Buena Vista Horace Mann provides systems of support that holistically address the needs of its students.

Each of these structures and approaches has enabled Buena Vista Horace Mann to make significant progress in increasing attendance. Unlike in the past, Buena Vista Horace Mann well exceeded district and county chronic absenteeism rates in 2021–22, suggesting that the school community was grappling with the destabilizing effects of the pandemic. Since then, it has dramatically reduced its chronic absenteeism rate by 20 percentage points. (See Table 1.) The increased attendance that Buena Vista Horace Mann has enabled is notable given that pandemic effects were severe in this new-immigrant community that has experienced extensive employment, homelessness, and mobility challenges for several years.

Table 1. Chronic Absenteeism at Buena Vista Horace Mann, 2018–2024

Population	2018–19	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Buena Vista Horace Mann	13.2%	44.9%	36.5%	25.0%[a]
San Francisco Unified School District	18.8%	33.2%	31.9%	-
San Francisco County	18.9%	33.3%	32.1%	-
California	12.1%	30.0%	24.9%	-

[a] Self-reported data for the 2023–24 school year, since publicly available California Department of Education (CDE) data were not available at the time of publication. However, schools' self-reported data are the same data that will be reported by the CDE.

Note: As a result of the statewide school closures that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE determined that absenteeism data for the 2019–20 academic year were invalid and unreliable and thus did not release them to the public. In addition, the CDE notes that the widespread implementation of distance learning affected attendance data during the 2020–21 academic year. For these reasons, data from those 2 years are omitted from the table.

Source: California Department of Education. DataQuest [Data set].

Elk Hills Elementary

Elk Hills Elementary (Elk Hills) is a K–8 school in Kern County, located near Bakersfield in California's Central Valley. As a one-school rural district, Elk Hills enrolled 163 students in 2023–24, the majority of whom were socioeconomically disadvantaged (58.1%) and White (80.2%).

Elk Hills is a member of the West Kern Consortium for Full-Service Community Schools, which brings together six districts to coordinate and leverage resources to enable community schooling in this rural region. The consortium was officially established upon receiving a Full-Service Community Schools grant from the federal government in 2018. Over time, the consortium has received additional federal and state grants, including a CCSPP grant in 2021, that have allowed it to bring Elk Hills and two high school districts into the fold.

Like the other districts in the consortium, Elk Hills organizes its community school around five priority areas that were collaboratively identified through the federal grant application process: (1) early childhood education, (2) expanded learning, (3) math and literacy education, (4) family and community engagement, and (5) social and mental health services. Key to developing and implementing these priority areas are school-based community school coordinators and social workers. Elk Hills' community school coordinator, hired in 2020, works closely with the social worker and other school staff members to understand and address student absenteeism at the site level. As the Elk Hills coordinator and social worker provide families with supportive interventions to combat chronic absenteeism, the school maintains relationship-centered structures and practices that aim to enhance school connectedness among students and families to support increased attendance.

Through these approaches, Elk Hills has greatly improved its chronic absenteeism rate, which saw a significant uptick in 2022–23, when it exceeded both state and county averages. Since the 2022–23 school year, Elk Hills has reduced its chronic absenteeism rate to 9.6%—a 20% decrease from the previous year and lower than its 2018–19 prepandemic rate. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Chronic Absenteeism at Elk Hills Elementary, 2018–2024

Population	2018–19	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Elk Hills	13.8%	16.7%	30.5%	9.6%[a]
Kern County	11.5%	37.6%	26.3%	-
California	12.1%	30.0%	24.9%	-

[a] Self-reported data for the 2023–24 school year, since publicly available California Department of Education (CDE) data were not available at the time of publication. However, schools' self-reported data are the same data that will be reported by the CDE.

Notes: As a result of the statewide school closures that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE determined that absenteeism data for the 2019–20 academic year were invalid and unreliable and thus did not release them to the public. In addition, the CDE notes that the widespread implementation of distance learning affected attendance data during the 2020–21 academic year. For these reasons, data from those 2 years are omitted from the table.

Elk Hills Elementary is the sole school in the Elk Hills School District. No district data is reported in the table, as it is captured in school-level data.

Source: California Department of Education. DataQuest [Data set].

Helen Keller Elementary

Helen Keller Elementary School (Helen Keller) is a Title I school serving students from transitional kindergarten through Grade 6 in the Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood Unified)—a small district spanning 4 square miles in Los Angeles County. In 2023–24, it served 434 students, the majority of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (98%) and identified as Latinx (91%). Twenty-four percent were English learners, 9.7% were designated as students with disabilities, and close to 5% were newcomers to the United States.

Lynwood Unified first implemented the community schools strategy in 2019 in one of the district's comprehensive high schools—Lynwood High School—under the Los Angeles County of Education's Community Schools Initiative. In 2023, Lynwood Unified received a second-round CCSPP implementation grant to turn all 17 of its schools into community schools. This grant allowed Lynwood Unified to hire both the district- and school-level personnel needed to support the district's vision for community schools, including community school coordinators on every campus and certified student analysts who support general education students requiring intensive supports and/or interventions. CCSPP funding also enabled the district to generate systems and efficiencies to deepen its existing infrastructure around whole child education and integrated services, including a robust health collaborative offering physical and mental health services to students and families.

The 2023–24 school year was the first year of implementation at Helen Keller. The newly hired community school coordinator has prioritized building relationships with parents, students, and staff and increasing parent engagement. In her role, she also works closely with the community liaison to conduct home visits, communicate the importance of attendance, and help connect families and students with an array of resources available through school-based partnerships and the district's health collaborative.

After maintaining a chronic absenteeism rate lower than its host district and surrounding county in the immediate wake of the pandemic, Helen Keller saw the number of chronically absent students rise to 40.7% in 2022–23. The early systemic efforts to track attendance and conduct outreach to families by the school's newly hired community school coordinator and community liaison helped Helen Keller reduce its chronic absenteeism rate by 15 percentage points in 1 year, to 25% in 2023–24.

Table 3. Chronic Absenteeism at Helen Keller Elementary, 2018–2024

Population	2018–19	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Helen Keller	18.9%	29.5%	40.7%	25.0%[a]
Lynwood Unified School District	18.9%	37.1%	40.2%	-
Los Angeles County	13.8%	31.2%	26.8%	-
California	12.1%	30.0%	24.9%	-

[a] Self-reported data for the 2023–24 school year, since publicly available California Department of Education (CDE) data were not available at the time of publication. However, schools' self-reported data are the same data that will be reported by the CDE.

Note: As a result of the statewide school closures that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE determined that absenteeism data for the 2019–20 academic year were invalid and unreliable and thus did not release them to the public. In addition, the CDE notes that the widespread implementation of distance learning affected attendance data during the 2020–21 academic year. For these reasons, data from those 2 years are omitted from the table.

Source: California Department of Education. DataQuest [Data set].

Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary

Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary (Roybal-Allard) is a K–6 community school in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Located in Huntington Park, a city in South Central Los Angeles County, Roybal-Allard served 483 students in 2023–24, most of whom qualified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (90.3%). The school's student population was predominately Latinx (98.5%), and more than a quarter of students (26.8%) were English learners. Eleven percent of its students were identified as having disabilities, and 1.9% were experiencing homelessness.

A collective bargaining agreement between LAUSD and United Teachers Los Angeles allocated district funding to the systematic development and growth of community schools in 2019. CCSPP implementation grants, totaling more than $83 million, have bolstered district funding, allowing the district to onboard and support 61 community schools to date. Through these investments, the district has placed full-time

community school coordinators and part-time community school representatives, who support the coordinator to achieve community school goals and priorities, on every community school campus. Additionally, the district has used state funding to develop systems and processes that support community schools, such as a robust system of professional development for community school staff.

Roybal-Allard, which opened as a pilot school in 2012, was founded by a group of educators who embraced the principles of community schooling and envisioned the school as a hub for academic excellence and essential community services. The school offers three programs: a resident school with a global studies focus, a Spanish dual language program, and a DREAMS (Design Thinking, Research, Engineering, Arts, and Math) magnet program. As a community school, Roybal-Allard prioritizes student belonging and engagement; safety; rigorous, project-based learning; and partnerships that provide physical and mental health services.

Like schools across the country, Roybal-Allard's chronic absenteeism rate surged in the 2021–22 academic year, reaching 52.7% and far surpassing the district, county, and state rates. Actively working to improve attendance, the school has seen marked progress, reducing the rate by slightly more than 15% in 2022–23 and cutting the rate by more than half in 2 years. At the conclusion of the 2023–24 school year, the school reported a rate of 20.7%. School staff at Roybal-Allard, including a pupil service and attendance coordinator, achieved this feat by addressing chronic absenteeism through a data-driven multitiered approach that focuses on building strong relationships with students and families, creating a welcoming and engaging environment, and providing personalized support and incentives.

Table 4. Chronic Absenteeism at Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary, 2018–2024

Population	2018–19	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Lucille Roybal-Allard	20.8%	52.7%	36.9%	20.7%[a]
Los Angeles Unified School District	18.4%	36.9%	30.8%	-
Los Angeles County	13.8%	31.2%	26.8%	-
California	12.1%	30.0%	24.9%	-

[a] Self-reported data for the 2023–24 school year, since publicly available California Department of Education (CDE) data were not available at the time of publication. However, schools' self-reported data are the same data that will be reported by the CDE.

Note: As a result of the statewide school closures that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDE determined that absenteeism data for the 2019–20 academic year were invalid and unreliable and thus did not release them to the public. In addition, the CDE notes that the widespread implementation of distance learning affected attendance data during the 2020–21 academic year. For these reasons, data from those 2 years are omitted from the table.

Source: California Department of Education. DataQuest [Data set].

How Community Schools Have Reduced Chronic Absenteeism

> The mission of a community school is to take care of whatever's coming up for a family in service of a student's ability to feel stable enough to learn. … A community school says our job is to address whatever those stressors are in the child's life so that they can feel calm enough and safe enough to learn in class and so that all their classmates can, too.
>
> —Buena Vista Horace Mann Principal

The community schools highlighted in this report are committed to meeting students' and families' holistic needs so that youth can learn and thrive. This includes working to ensure that students consistently attend school and that they are cognitively, socially, and emotionally supported once they get there. While the featured community schools operate in disparate settings and have varying programmatic features, they embrace common approaches that have allowed them to effectively achieve this goal.

These shared strategies are described in the sections below. They include improving family engagement and instituting approaches that facilitate student connectedness and relationship-building. The featured schools also engage in systematic data monitoring and leverage tiered systems of support and cross-sector partnerships to enable consistent attendance among youth and families. Community school coordinators play a central role in enacting these approaches in each community school, lending important capacity to their effective implementation. Taken together, these approaches create a culture of support to combat chronic absenteeism rather than one that relies on punitive measures, which have been shown to alienate families and students rather than build the relationships essential to understanding and addressing the underlying reasons that students miss school.[18]

Improving Family Engagement

To stem chronic absenteeism at their sites, the featured community schools placed increased attention on family engagement—an approach that is associated with a range of positive youth outcomes[19] and has been shown to be a pivotal factor in school improvement efforts.[20]

Practitioners at each school described how student absences initiate a range of responses, including immediate actions like phone calls or texts to families who have not called to excuse an absence as well as more intensive outreach to those who are near or over the threshold of being chronically absent. Among the latter are one-on-one conversations and home visits with families of chronically absent students, often initiated and facilitated by a community school coordinator or other community school personnel. For instance, the social worker at Elk Hills described how she engaged in these efforts in the past year:
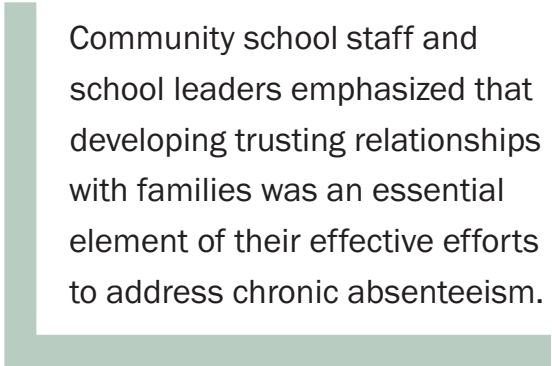
> We brought in parents, met with them, and showed them, "Hey, your kid is missing 20 days of school this whole year. What can we do? We have this person, and this person, and this person [at the school] that can support you."

As reflected in her comments, extended conversations with families about chronic absenteeism consistently included offers to connect parents and guardians to key personnel or resources to support increased attendance.

COVID-19 altered the routine of attending school and how parents and schools calculated the risks and benefits—to the individual and school community—of sending a child to school who may be feeling ill. As the community school coordinator at Buena Vista Horace Mann explained, "[There was] a dramatic shift in the perception at home of how critical it was to be at school every day." Engaging families to recalibrate expectations and guidelines became an important strategy for addressing chronic absenteeism. To ensure that kids come to school when they are healthy or at low risk for infecting others, staff in the featured schools have engaged in proactive strategies, through communication and outreach campaigns, to reinforce the importance of attendance.

For instance, staff at Elk Hills and other elementary schools in its consortium used social media and other forms of written communication (e.g., flyers, emails, doorhangers) to support the development of healthy at-home routines (e.g., time management) that could support wellness and attendance. At Buena Vista Horace Mann, staff sent letters home that presented their student's attendance data and included information about the importance of daily attendance. Collectively, these efforts serve to invest parents and guardians in consistent attendance. The Roybal-Allard principal expressed why these information campaigns were critical to combating chronic absenteeism: "I think parents, especially with the pandemic, had a different definition of what good attendance was because [school] was online. So, now coming back, it's also about reeducation."

Community school staff and school leaders also emphasized that developing trusting relationships with families was an essential element of their effective efforts to address chronic absenteeism. The Roybal-Allard principal described the importance of trust-building in increasing attendance, explaining, "Trust is built through small actions over time. I think when [caregivers] identify the school as a safe, trusting place to send their kids, they're more willing to come." Practitioners at each community school described a range of relationship-building approaches they employed, including greeting parents and guardians at the gate during arrival and dismissal and hosting community events that provide opportunities for families and staff to engage and develop connections.

> Community school staff and school leaders emphasized that developing trusting relationships with families was an essential element of their effective efforts to address chronic absenteeism.

The community school coordinator at Elk Hills, who organizes events and leads efforts to increase attendance, described the impact of these relationship-building approaches, saying, "The relationships I've built with parents who were really unavailable—who didn't call in the absences, didn't come to campus, didn't come to events—now they're here, and they're calling in. They're emailing or texting me." She attributes this to both the work she did throughout the pandemic and concerted efforts to be trustworthy, to be respectful, and to curate the school environment to be welcoming to all. The coordinator began her role just 2 weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the school, and, as happened all over the country, her job shifted. She became the point person for ensuring students and families had the technology needed for learning to continue remotely. Reflecting on this time, she noted, "I became the IT help desk, which was also [developed into a] phone counseling system." During this really stressful time, she was not only troubleshooting, showing up at families' homes to assist them, but was

also the consistent school representative who would pick up the phone and listen to parents vent and share their hardships. This "blessing in disguise," as she described it, allowed her to build strong and trusting relationships.

Centering relationships in the strategy to mitigate chronic absenteeism has also allowed the community schools to move away from less effective approaches that seek to compel attendance through punitive measures.[21] As the Roybal-Allard principal explained, "We have families for whom there was always a negative connotation: 'Oh no, you're tardy or absent.' … Now … they just go to the gate. The community rep can help them with anything they need and answer questions. They're welcomed to school." The principal at Helen Keller described a similar shift in the reception to school outreach on attendance, noting how the community school coordinator supported this dynamic:

> In the past it would just be that the principal would call home and find out more information. But now, with [the] community school coordinator, I think it's a friendly face that they know is there strictly to support and to give you resources.

This evidence shows that building relationships with families may mitigate fears of stigma or repercussions that can prevent some parents and guardians from engaging in school settings after a significant absence or inconsistent attendance.

Overall, the featured schools employed a multifaceted approach to engaging families that was grounded in consistent communication and relationship-building. This not only reflects a fundamental feature of high-quality community schools but also serves to facilitate greater alignment between home and school norms, practices, and values.

Increasing Student Connectedness and Relationship-Building

Relationship-building with students was also seen as a critical approach to supporting increased attendance, and the featured community schools implemented strategies for strengthening relationships across their communities. For example, multiple schools have small-group structures built into the school day to enable closer connections between students and school staff. At Buena Vista Horace Mann, students in grades 6–8 participate in advisory groups. Each advisory is composed of 11 students and one teacher, who meet 4 times per week. They spend this time in community circles developing social-emotional skills; forming relationships with peers; and building the muscles for communicating, listening, and discussion.

Elk Hills uses a mentorship program to foster student–staff connectedness, where each classified and non-classified staff member at the school is assigned a small, mixed-grade group of student mentees. Mentors meet with their mentees once per month, completing optional activities that support social and emotional learning and, importantly, build peer-to-peer and student–adult bonds in a low-stakes setting. One Elk Hills teacher reflected on the power of these mentorship groups:

> Our mentorship groups have helped a lot, because kids have gotten to be able to connect on a deeper level than with just a school teacher on campus, and that gives them a safe space. … It has shifted the attitude of a lot of our kids.

Through these, and other, small-group structures, schools are able to help students experience a sense of belonging and form connections with a trusted adult and their peers.

Schools are also intentionally creating supplemental and extracurricular activities designed to be engaging and support socialization. This year, the culture and climate team at Buena Vista Horace Mann is working with their middle school students to increase their sense of belonging, asking students questions like, "What makes you feel really good about being here on-site? What is the quality of your experience once you're here? What do you want to have happen that isn't happening right now?" Based on students' responses, they began implementing wellness days throughout the year focused on physical and mental health, and they created a wellness center—similar to a student lounge—that offers music and free food on a regular basis. As the principal explained, "We're hoping that continuing to do things like that will show students that this is really their school. … Then, as a result, they will want to be here."

Similarly, Helen Keller introduced Wellness Wednesdays, organized by the community school coordinator and social-emotional learning coach. On these days, during recess, students can opt in to a focused activity or game, like drawing a picture of themselves and showing or writing their positive attributes. These adult-monitored safe spaces have allowed students with "smaller friend circles" to make connections with their peers. The principal shared that students have "actually gained friendships through those Wednesday activities, and they look forward to it, especially if [their] anxiety is kicking up."

Meanwhile, Roybal-Allard's principal and community school coordinator emphasize the importance of focusing on the whole child, including providing enriching, outside-the-classroom experiences based on family preferences. They have leveraged partnerships to expand after-school program options, which include a coding club, choir, cheer, basketball, and other sports. These opportunities, they believe, will help students reengage with school and interact with peers after spending so much time at home during the pandemic. The principal emphasized the importance of "this idea of the kids' community and building a sense of belonging" and said, "I feel like kids come to school when they feel like they belong here and they're connected to other individuals." In instituting these structures and practices, the principal said, she is able to "see their excited faces." She continued, "I hear their voices, I go into the classroom, and they're learning."

Similarly, Buena Vista Horace Mann offers enrichment opportunities within the school day and outside of it. Middle schoolers participate in seminar electives run by community partners, including art, weightlifting, chess, DJing, and a mariachi program. They also partner with the Jamestown Community Center, which cultivates a diverse set of before- and after-school programming. Students can learn cooking, coding, soccer, skateboarding, painting, poetry, theater, and chess, among many other activities. These types of non-classroom organized activities have "facilitated socialization" and rebuilt pandemic-induced "atrophied social muscles," according to the coordinator. Finding different avenues to keep students engaged is one way the school has tackled student attendance.

Reinvigorating students' desire to be in school, to learn, and to be with friends is key to improving attendance. The featured schools are building on key community school practices, like enriched and expanded learning opportunities and building a culture of belonging, safety, and care to increase engagement and connectedness.

Systematic Data Tracking and Monitoring

The historic rise in chronic absence, as well as growing attention to attendance in state school accountability systems, has pushed schools to focus more acutely on who is missing school and why. The featured community schools have developed consistent systems for collecting, tracking, analyzing, and acting on data. At Elk Hills, the community school coordinator has a strict routine. Every day after greeting students and families at the gate during arrival, she sits at her desk and examines attendance data. She checks to see who is out, which families forgot to call in the absence from the day before, and which classes have earned 100% attendance for the day so they can receive credit and move closer to a pizza party (20 days of 100% attendance). For monthly meetings with the principal and the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) team, she analyzes data using the Everyday Labs platform, which provides these insights:

> It will show an overall view that's updated every other day with your chronic absenteeism rate. You can go to each child. It'll show you how many absences they have, where they stand, are they at risk, are they moderately chronic, severely, no attendance issues. You can create groups on there, and it'll show you attendance patterns. So if a student is missing Wednesdays all the time because that's our short day, or if they tend to be a vacation extender, it'll group those students together.

Having this data helps the coordinator, principal, and other members of the MTSS team at Elk Hills to identify if a student's absence pattern may indicate another barrier in attending school regularly. From there, targeted outreach allows the school to assess whether and which supports can help get the students to school more regularly. What these tiered interventions look like in practice is detailed in the next section.

Similarly, at Roybal-Allard, according to the community school coordinator, the pupil services and attendance counselor works with the leadership team to "look at attendance monthly and break it down by grade levels, by subgroups, and then look at why." They organize students into "bands" (chronic, basic, and excellent) based on accumulated absences, ideally no more than 1 for every 25 days of school. This helps staff motivate students who border two bands, and to home in on students who are in the "chronic" band. Staff at Buena Vista Horace Mann also have a systematic approach to data analysis. A coordinated care team identifies students approaching chronic levels of absenteeism. As the community school coordinator explained, "Our team used a protocol where our wellness leads identified students [at risk of chronic absenteeism] and answered these questions: Who's improving? Who's missing more [school] than they were before? What trends do you see?"

At Helen Keller, the principal described their use of data as one of the most successful strategies they have employed to bolster attendance. She shared:

> I think our focus of really looking at the patterns of attendance [is] really important because it helps us focus on the families who really need the support and who really need the constant engagement to remind them that they need to come to school.

Through the data analysis and targeted outreach, the principal, coordinator, and family liaison gain a firm grip on the root cause for each student who misses several days of school. The principal explained:

I can print out a report for our attendance right now, and I can give you a reason why every one of our students is on that list, right? These two sisters, it's because mom works in the morning, and she struggles sometimes to [get them] to school. For [another student], it's because he has anxiety, he's starting to take medication, and it's not working for him. I can go through case by case because of the conversations that I have with parents or that the community liaison has with parents, or information that's been provided by the teachers to me. I can break down case by case why students are missing or what we suspect is the issue. … It doesn't mean that we can [solve every] problem or [stop] brainstorming ideas on how to support them.

This engagement with data allows the school-based teams to effectively and efficiently leverage the services and resources available to the students and families most in need. Importantly, this work does not fall to one person. Rather, data are reviewed and decisions are made collaboratively, allowing for multiple voices and perspectives to inform the supportive solutions that are identified.

Utilizing Tiered Systems of Support to Increase Attendance

The systemic use of data aids the highlighted community schools in leveraging the tiered support systems (e.g., MTSS) they have in place to tackle chronic absenteeism. As with their approaches to providing students with academic, social, or emotional supports, these schools use universal (Tier 1) strategies designed to reach all students and targeted and intensive (Tiers 2 and 3) strategies intended to support students struggling with attendance.

Tier 1 strategies encourage attendance among all students. These universal strategies include student connectedness—an approach that leaders and staff at the featured community schools named as essential to their efforts to combat chronic absenteeism. Several schools emphasized that their Tier 1 interventions are designed to support students in building friendships and to nurture close connections between students and adults. The principal at Roybal-Allard shared that one cause of absenteeism in the postpandemic years is increased social anxiety and rusty social skills among students. To address this, Roybal-Allard has provided structured opportunities for students to interact with their peers and build friendships. These include after-school sports clubs and a new program called Elevo, in which coaches engage students in fun, productive activities that incorporate social and emotional skills.

In addition to relationship-centered approaches, community school staff mentioned the use of incentives as a universal strategy to bolster attendance. For example, Elk Hills has developed reward systems such as a monthly raffle drawing for students who missed no more than 1 day of school during the month. Similarly, Roybal-Allard strategically plans fun activities and giveaways on days that are typically low attendance (e.g., the days after winter and spring breaks) and displays bulletin boards that present student improvements in attendance.

For students and families needing more intensive attendance support—as identified through the data collection and analysis processes described above—the community schools use a range of targeted (Tiers 2 and 3) strategies to support families. For example, Buena Vista Horace Mann, Elk Hills, and Roybal-Allard utilize parent conferences on-site and home visits to meet with families, understand the barriers that prevent students from regularly attending school, and connect families with resources. For more complex (Tier 3) cases, students and families may require referrals for additional services, such as mental health counseling, relief funds, or housing and transportation.

Overall, the community schools leverage their tiered systems of support to increase attendance and meet individual student and family needs. This approach allows them to address chronic absenteeism through data-driven approaches and processes to connect students and families to needed resources and opportunities.

> The community schools leverage their tiered systems of support to increase attendance and meet individual student and family needs.

Leveraging Partnerships to Support Youth and Families

Partnerships with external organizations are critical to community schools and their ability to foster youth well-being and achievement through integrated systems of support and other school features. Some of the focal community schools reinforced the importance of partnerships and pointed to their role in addressing chronic absenteeism.

The partnership that supports Buena Vista Horace Mann's "Stay-Over Program" is an illustrative case. This noteworthy program seeks to address San Francisco's growing housing crisis by providing overnight shelter as well as food and other supportive services for up to 60 people in the school's gymnasium. The program, which is open 7 days per week to all San Francisco Unified School District students and families experiencing homelessness, is made possible by a collaboration and joint-use agreement between the school, the district, the city, and the county.[22] Buena Vista Horace Mann's principal explained why this program is important for students and school attendance:

> If a student is concerned about where they're going to sleep that night, or if they're going to have enough food, or if their mother is safe from violence, if they're going home to a housing situation that is far less than ideal, they're not going to be able to really attend in the ways that we want them to in class.

This statement suggests this partnership is seen as supportive of the school's goals of reducing chronic absenteeism.

Helen Keller's partnership with the California-based nonprofit Think Together provides another example of how community school partnerships can support increased attendance. Across Lynwood Unified, data showed that parents and caregivers who need to be at work before schools open their doors were struggling to bring their children to school. In response, Helen Keller partnered with Think Together, which organizes programming for youth outside of school hours, to provide before-school care. A little over a month after the service began, more than 25 families were already participating.

As partnerships can connect youth and families to site-based services that support school attendance in community schools, evidence from Elk Hills suggests that cross-sector collaborations can also inform the identification of effective strategies that community schools use to combat chronic absenteeism. Specifically, a first-of-its-kind rural Children's Cabinet advises Elk Hills and other districts in its consortium in tackling key challenges and better connecting schools to resources. The cross-sector advisory cabinet was established in 2018 and is composed of district leaders, parents, students, community school coordinators, and representatives of county- and community-based organizations, such as College Community Services, Community Action Partnership of Kern, and Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

The Children's Cabinet has actively advised Elk Hills and other consortium districts around the challenge of chronic absenteeism, helping the community school collective to identify attendance barriers, research innovative solutions, and improve ways to track attendance progress. The cabinet's collective efforts have generated tangible resources and strategies for community schools affiliated with the consortium, including protocols to guide home visits, effective messaging campaigns to support attendance awareness, and the development of high-quality attendance teams. Significant decreases in chronic absenteeism at Elk Hills and other elementary districts in the consortium suggest that the advice and strategic insights garnered from the cross-sector Children's Cabinet are yielding results.

Key Role of Community School Coordinators

Staff in the featured schools identified many factors and circumstances that lead to chronic absenteeism, including transportation barriers, work schedules, homelessness, student and family mental health challenges, and confusion around attendance policies. Given the range of challenges that can contribute to chronic absenteeism, efforts to increase school attendance require school staff to identify *why* students are missing school and to support families in overcoming barriers to attendance. In this, community school coordinators play a critical role.

Coordinators in the featured schools lend essential capacity and attention to the strategies for combating chronic absenteeism described above. For instance, community school coordinators at Buena Vista Horace Mann, Elk Hills, and Helen Keller support data tracking and analysis processes that help identify students in need of attendance interventions, which in turn informs how schools leverage their tiered systems of support to meet student and family needs. Community school coordinators also play a prominent role in relationship-building with students and families. They are intentionally visible to students and families, often welcoming each child to the campus in the morning and taking opportunities to have informal conversations with students and families whenever possible. Coordinators also organize and support structures intended to foster student connectedness and well-being, as demonstrated by the role of coordinators in leading the mentorship program at Elk Hills and Wellness Wednesdays at Helen Keller.

With their focus on family engagement, community school coordinators play a large role in supporting parental outreach and communication regarding attendance promotion. They are often charged with making initial phone calls home when a student is absent from school and pursue more extended conversations with families when students are chronically absent or nearing the threshold. The latter includes home visits. For instance, at Helen Keller, the community school coordinator conducts approximately 10 home visits per month to support students who are chronically absent. She noted that the visits allow her to explain the types of resources that Helen Keller can provide to support student attendance. She shared:

> It's our opportunity to let them know we have hot spots, we have school uniforms. If that's the reason you are not coming to school, we can [help] with transportation, housing stability. Maybe they have issues going at home, [such as] divorce, trauma. We can provide referrals for therapy services.

In addition to this outreach, community school coordinators described other activities they engaged in to support attendance, such as leading messaging and informational campaigns about the importance of school attendance and organizing monthly raffles for students with strong attendance.

Community school coordinators also play a pivotal role in bringing resources to families through partnerships. The community school coordinator at Buena Vista Horace Mann explained:

> [It is my job to] turn those needs that are surfaced into resources. When families said they needed housing, it was, "Let's bring in the supervisor's office and find out how we can get families into housing." When our data told us mental health was a need, it was, "Let's write this Kaiser grant to run a pilot." The cycle is identify the need, gather the data in a way that is meaningful, present that data to the folks that can provide services or resources, and then build a program around that.

In addition to identifying resources, Buena Vista Horace Mann's community school coordinator explained that his role entails managing the partnerships that provide needed resources. "I'm responsible for bringing in partnerships that can do that work and maintaining [those] relationships," he said. "That network of support has to be maintained, and that is what I have my eye on." Community school coordinators manage partners to support many aspects of school and students' lives, and these skills allow them to address chronic absenteeism using a similar skill set.

The activities that support school attendance—providing incentives for consistent attendance, regularly analyzing attendance data, meeting with students, conducting home visits with families, identifying community resources, and managing partnerships—are time-intensive and require skilled work. The featured schools benefit from community school coordinators who have expertise in identifying student and family needs, building relationships with families, and developing partnerships with organizations that can provide the support that students need to attend school regularly.

While community school coordinators in the featured schools provided critical capacity and support, they did not work alone. They collaborated with administrators and other site-based support teams to make sense of attendance data and to implement supportive approaches that help students and families come to school regularly. Principals at these sites played a key role in supporting and encouraging the community school coordinators to take leadership in these efforts. The collective efforts to combat chronic absenteeism in the featured sites embodies a key practice in high-quality community schools: an embrace of collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice.

Key Takeaways for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Concerns about chronic absenteeism are prevalent as schools grapple with the reality of post–COVID-19 pandemic challenges. Policymakers and educators throughout the nation can learn from the California community schools featured here, which are making substantial progress in addressing these challenges head-on.

Community school personnel and site leaders at the featured schools pointed to structures and processes that enabled their effective efforts to stem chronic absenteeism. These included lending dedicated capacity to combating chronic absenteeism through the critical work of their community school coordinators, who closely collaborated with school leaders and other staff to identify attendance barriers, support students and families in addressing those challenges, and manage partnerships with service providers. The schools also increased attention to family engagement and relationship-building with students to bolster their sense of school connectedness. Community school staff at the featured sites also systematically monitored attendance data, used a tiered system to provide differentiated supports to increase attendance, and leveraged school–community partnerships to support students and families.

These strategies demonstrate key learnings about effective approaches to increasing school attendance:

- **Effective approaches to combating chronic absenteeism are not just reactive but also proactive and preventive in nature.** The community schools featured in this report did not solely wait for problems to arise. Instead, they actively invested in engaging families, often sharing the importance of consistent attendance and information about students' attendance data. They also focused on relationship-building with students and families and worked to create a school climate that felt warm and welcoming. These efforts fostered a sense of connection, making community schools places where students and families wanted to be.

- **Trusting relationships with students and families—rather than punitive approaches—are foundational in preventing and reducing chronic absenteeism.** Without trust and a feeling of connectedness to school, efforts to support chronically absent students are unlikely to succeed. The community school staff emphasized that if students and families trust that community school staff care about them, are there to help, and will welcome them even if they are running late or have missed a substantial number of school days, they are usually willing to show up and seek support when needed. By partnering with students and families to problem-solve attendance barriers together, these schools adopted a restorative approach rather than a punitive approach, which might involve actions such as employing truant officers or taking legal action against parents.

- **A systematic approach to utilizing data and managing the provision of services is important.** When challenges arose that created barriers to attendance, the featured community schools were prepared to respond quickly in providing support for both students and families. They had robust data systems and analysis processes that helped them to identify students who were nearing and exceeding the chronic absenteeism threshold and to consider underlying causes that the school could work to mitigate. The community schools also had a structured approach to managing the provision of services (such as transportation assistance, overnight shelter space for families experiencing homelessness, and mental health care) to help address attendance barriers for students and

families. By leveraging a tiered system of support to meet the differential needs of students and families around attendance, the schools were able to offer a coherent approach to supporting attendance that aligns with how they already approached intervention and challenges in other areas.

- **Community school coordinators played a critical role in reducing chronic absenteeism, pointing to the importance of dedicated capacity to address the challenge.** All practitioners at the featured schools played a role in partnering with families and developing the trusting relationships that form the backbone for supporting school attendance. However, given the range of challenges that contribute to chronic absenteeism—some of which, such as mental health, have been exacerbated by the pandemic—schools need capacity to address attendance barriers. The community school coordinators met this need. The coordinators played a key role in tracking and analyzing data and in brainstorming solutions. They were central figures in strengthening family engagement, building trusting relationships, and managing external partnerships at school sites—the latter of which also provided resources and support to increase attendance at many of the community schools.

- **Collaboration among varied school actors can support efforts to stem chronic absenteeism.** While dedicated capacity to support students and families in reducing absenteeism was important in the featured community schools, collaboration and consultation among administrators, school support teams, and community school coordinators helped schools in meeting student and family attendance challenges. The principals at these sites, in particular, engaged in a collaborative leadership approach that provided coordinators the support and flexibility to address the issue.

- **Schools benefit from being part of a broader network of community schools that supports their efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism in a restorative manner.** While the community schools featured in this report operate in vastly different school district contexts, they are all part of broader community school initiatives that are receiving state grant funding through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The districts in which the schools are situated have committed to the community schools strategy and are providing support and training to participating school sites. Host districts also have established systems-level (e.g., city or county) partnerships that enable community school sites to access resources for students and families, rather than each site adopting a "one school at a time" partnership approach. Having systemic supports in place enhances and reinforces the work at individual schools, so they can expand their efforts rather than battling against a misaligned system.

These takeaways can inform leaders and practitioners who are working to identify and implement approaches to address chronic absenteeism in their own settings. While their form and scope will look distinct in implementation, particularly in non–community school settings and at the high school level, they nonetheless shed light on the importance of a multifaceted and collaborative strategy to support consistent attendance—one that provides key supports and interventions when needed while ensuring that schools are environments where students and families want to be.

As this report highlights, community schools are particularly well positioned to address the challenge of chronic absenteeism and its varied underlying causes. With their dedicated staff (e.g., community school coordinators) and key practices (e.g., family and community engagement, integrated student supports, community partnerships, collaborative leadership), community schools have the structure, resources, and commitment to partner with students and families to address attendance barriers in a holistic manner that supports student achievement and well-being.

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