

California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-003 (REV. 11/2017)

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# California State Board of EducationJuly 2023 AgendaItem #02

## Subject

Update on the Implementation of the Integrated Local, State, and Federal Accountability and Continuous Improvement System: Addendum to the Continuing Work and Revisions Under Consideration for the 2023 Dashboard Related to the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator.

## Type of Action

Information

## Summary of the Issue(s)

This item provides an overview of the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator definitions and methodology used for the California School Dashboard (Dashboard).

Specifically, following a two-year pause in producing accountability metrics on the Dashboard in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Department of Education (CDE) requested guidance from the State Board of Education (SBE) at their March 2022 meeting on whether there was interest in adjusting the cut scores in preparation for a Status only Dashboard (i.e., Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Very Low). Prior to the SBE meeting, the technical and policy workgroups had recommended that the SBE should not adjust the cut scores and that lowering standards may not provide an accurate picture of what is occurring at schools. The SBE ultimately did not approve adjusting cut scores for any state indicators for the 2022 Dashboard. With the pre-pandemic cut scores in place, 617 local educational agencies were determined to be eligible for differentiated assistance and over 7,000 schools were eligible for assistance under the Every Student Succeeds Act requirements based on the 2022 Dashboard results.

Accordingly, during the March 2023 SBE meeting, SBE members discussed the high rates of absenteeism (an increase from a statewide average of 14.3 percent in 2020–21 to 30 percent in 2021–22) and its’ subsequent impact in assistance eligibility under state and federal accountability requirements. At that time, the SBE did not take action to direct the CDE to explore this indicator further. However, during general public comment at the May 2023 SBE meeting, members of the public suggested that local educational agencies and schools may no longer view the Dashboard as a system that reports relevant data due to the lack of differentiation in the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator which led to a high number of eligibility determinations. In response, the SBE directed the CDE to bring this item back for discussion and to reopen the 2023 accountability workplan.

### Chronic Absenteeism Webinar Series and Resources

Under the direction of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, the CDE hosted a series of webinars beginning in January 2023 in partnership with Attendance Works, one of the nation’s leading authorities on attendance supports for students, schools, and families. A longtime supporter of reducing chronic absence, Superintendent Thurmond has consistently used his role to advocate for this issue.

In the press release announcing the webinar series, Superintendent Thurmond shared the following:

“Thirty percent of all California students are reported to be chronically absent, so this affects school districts throughout our state, and we all need to look at strategies and solutions,” said Superintendent Thurmond. “But I ask that we not lose our equity lens. The consequences of chronic absence do not affect all students, all families, all schools, and all communities equally. As we consider the critical information being heard today, I ask that you hold your lens at an equity angle. We know that African American students, Native American students, and youth who are engaged with the foster care and juvenile justice systems have chronic absenteeism numbers almost 10 percent higher than our other student groups.”

In addition to the webinar series, Superintendent Thurmond conducted school visits around the state to volunteer directly with outreach efforts. The CDE has sent guidance to local educational agencies with resources and best practices to school districts on ways to counter chronic absenteeism.

### Recommendation

The CDE recommends that the SBE provide guidance and direction for any changes they would like to see explored for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator as part of the 2023 accountability workplan.

## Brief History of Key Issues

California’s accountability system was developed to align with the priorities of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and to meet the requirements under the ESSA. Chronic absenteeism is a metric identified as part of LCFF Priority 5 (Pupil Engagement). The ESSA requires states to collect data to identify students who are chronically absent and report chronic absenteeism rates for schools in the ESSA State Report Card (Section 1111[h][1][C][viii]).

Under California’s ESSA State Plan, chronic absenteeism serves as an additional academic indicator for kindergarten through grade eight (K–8). As adopted by the SBE, this indicator is limited to grades K–8 and is not applied to grades nine through twelve. There are currently two indicators (graduation rate and college/career) that capture the impact of chronic absenteeism at the high school level. Note: the CDE provides Chronic Absenteeism Rate reports for all grade levels on the state’s data reporting web site, DataQuest.

Chronic absenteeism data is collected through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) and is used to calculate this indicator. This data was collected for the first time at the end of the 2016–17 school year. This data was released publicly in December 2017 and was reported on the California School Dashboard (Dashboard) through a direct link to the California Department of Education’s (CDE’s) reporting web site, DataQuest. In November 2018, the SBE adopted the cut scores and performance levels currently used for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator.

## Summary of Previous State Board of Education Discussion and Action

### Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

In November 2014, the SBE adopted the LCAP template, which included the formula for calculating the Chronic Absenteeism rate. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr14/documents/nov14item14.doc>)

In May 2016, the SBE adopted Chronic Absenteeism as a state indicator. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr16/documents/may16item02revised.doc>)

At the September 2017 SBE meeting, the CDE provided an update on the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator and the collection of chronic absenteeism data. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr17/documents/sep17item02.doc>)

At the November 2017 SBE meeting, the CDE provided extensive background on the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator and requested that the SBE: (1) include information in the Fall 2017 Dashboard to redirect users to the Chronic Absenteeism reports on DataQuest; (2) direct CDE staff to develop a recommendation for the March 2018 SBE meeting on proposed Status cut scores that will subsequently be used to update the Fall 2017 Dashboard Chronic Absenteeism Indicator; and (3) direct CDE staff to develop a recommendation for the September or November 2018 SBE meeting on proposed Change cut scores. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr17/documents/nov17item03.doc>)

In March 2018, the SBE was provided an update on proposed changes to the Dashboard for the 2018 Dashboard release, including an update on the development of the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr18/documents/mar18item01.docx>)

In August 2018, the SBE received an Information Memorandum on the proposed methodology for calculating the chronic absenteeism rate. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/memo-pptb-amard-aug18item02.docx>)

In September 2018, the SBE approved the methodology for calculating the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr18/documents/sep18item01.docx>)

In November 2018, the SBE approved Status and Change cut scores for the Chronic Indicator. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr18/documents/nov18item04.docx>)

## Fiscal Analysis (as appropriate)

California’s total kindergarten through grade twelve funding within the 2022–23 California Budget Act is $128.6 billion from the following sources:

* State: $78.9 billion (61.4 percent)
* Local: $37.0 billion (28.8 percent)
* Federal: $11.0 billion (8.6 percent)
* Lottery $1.5 (1.1 percent)

The Every Student Succeeds Act funds are also typically a portion of the total federal funding amount.

## Attachment(s)

* **Attachment 1:** Background and Options Available to the State Board of Education to Modify the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator (10 Pages)

# Attachment 1

## *Background*

This item provides an overview of the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator methodology and considerations for changes to the California School Dashboard (Dashboard) for this indicator.

The California Department of Education (CDE) annually presents the State Board of Education (SBE) with the accountability workplan at their March meeting which details the considerations for inclusion in the Dashboard each fall. The 2023 accountability workplan did not include any deliverables by the CDE for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator; however, during a subsequent meeting, SBE board members expressed an interest in reopening conversations around the measure.

## *Current Indicator and Methodology*

The Chronic Absenteeism Indicator is a state indicator on the Dashboard that is applied to grades kindergarten through eighth. It is defined as the percentage of students who were absent for 10 percent or more of the instructional days they were expected to attend. School closures due to natural disasters or emergencies are not reported in the data file. Accordingly, those school days are not included in the calculation of the indicator as students were not expected to attend school. Within California's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan, it serves as the “Other Academic Indicator” for grades kindergarten through eighth.

This indicator was developed in close collaboration with subject matter experts to ensure that any methodology it proposed would produce a valid, reliable, and fair measure. The CDE also reviewed methodologies used by other states who had a longer history of collecting chronic absenteeism data, as California collected these data for the first time at the end of the 2016–17 school year.

### Chronically Absent Calculation Methodology

The Chronic Absenteeism Indicator uses the following formula to determine each individual student’s absence rate using the most current year data:

**Days Absent Excused (In-Person) + Days Absent Unexcused (In-Person) +**

**Out-of-School Suspension Days + Non-ADA-Generating Independent Study Days**

***divided by***

**Expected Attendance Days.**

If a student is expected to attend a minimum of 31 days, and their calculated absence rate of 10 percent or more, then they are considered chronically absent.

Local educational agencies (LEAs) submit their local attendance data used for this indicator through the Student Absence Summary file which they certified in CALPADS End-of-Year 3 data collection. The absences in the formula come directly through the following data fields in CALPADS:

* **Days Absent Excused (In-Person)**: Total number of days the student was absent for in-person instruction for the entire school day with a valid excuse, per California *Education Code* (*EC*) Section 48260(c). (Field # 13.19)
* **Days Absent Unexcused (In-Person)**: Total number of days the student was absent from in-person instruction for the entire school day without a valid excuse. (Field # 13.20)
* **Out-of-School Suspension Days**: Total number of days the student was absent from the regular classroom for the entire school day due to an out-of-school suspension pursuant to *EC* Section 48911. (Field # 13.17)
* **Non-ADA Generating Independent Study Days**: Total number of days the student did not satisfy statutory and regulatory requirements necessary to generate a day attendance for either traditional (*EC* Section 51747.5) or course-based (*EC* Section 51749.5) independent study. (Field # 13.21)

### DataQuest and Absenteeism Data

The CDE’s data reporting website, DataQuest, produces two annual reports that complement the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator, 1) Absenteeism by Reason, and 2) Chronic Absenteeism. These reports display the annual kindergarten through grade twelve public school absence data by Race/Ethnicity, Program Subgroup, or Academic Year (Multi-Year) for the selected report level (state, county, district, or school). Each of these reports are accessible through the Absenteeism Data web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/crabtop.asp>.

A March 2023 PACE report titled, “Disparities in Unexcused Absences Across California Schools,” authored by Clea McNeely, Hedy Chang, and Kevin Gee (<https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/disparities-unexcused-absences-across-california-schools>) states that California’s Absenteeism by Reason report “set a precedent for the nation by publishing data on absenteeism (excused and unexcused), making sure they are easy to examine and review”.

### Chronic Absenteeism Status Calculation and Levels

Once each student’s absence rate is calculated, the next step is to take all the students who had a chronic absence rate of 10 percent or more and calculate the chronic absenteeism rate for LEAs, schools, and student groups. The Chronic Absenteeism Status calculation for the Dashboard is the:

**Total Number of Unduplicated Count of Students Who Were Absent 10 Percent or More of Instructional Days (in which the student was expected to attend) During the Academic Year**

***divided by***

**Total Number of Cumulatively Enrolled Students Who Meet Specific**

**“Eligible Enrolled” Requirements.**

Table 1 shows the Chronic Absenteeism status cut points approved by the SBE in 2018 and the established the status levels used on the Dashboard.

#### Table 1: Approved Status Levels for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

| **Status Level** | **Status Cut Points** |
| --- | --- |
| Very Low(highest status level) | Chronic absenteeism rate is 2.5% or less  |
| Low | Chronic absenteeism rate is 2.6% to 5.0% |
| Medium | Chronic absenteeism rate is 5.1% to 10% |
| High  | Chronic absenteeism rate is 10.1% to 20% |
| Very High(lowest status level) | Chronic absenteeism rate is 20.1% or more |

### Chronic Absenteeism Change Calculation and Levels

Change is calculated on the Dashboard by measuring how an LEA, school or student group has improved or declined compared to the prior year. The Chronic Absenteeism Change calculation for the Dashboard is the:

**Current Year Chronic Absenteeism Rate [Status]**

***minus***

**Prior Year Chronic Absenteeism Rate [Prior Year Status]**

Table 2 shows the Chronic Absenteeism change cut points approved by the SBE in 2018 and the established the change levels used on the Dashboard.

#### Table 2: Approved Change Cut Points for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

| **Change Level** | **Change Cut Points** |
| --- | --- |
| Declined Significantly (highest change level) | Chronic absenteeism rate declined by 3% or more  |
| Declined | Chronic absenteeism rate declined by 0.5% to 2.9% |
| Maintained | Chronic absenteeism rate declined or increased by 0.4% |
| Increased | Chronic absenteeism rate increased by 0.5% to 2.9% |
| Increased Significantly (lowest change level) | Chronic absenteeism rate increased by 3% or more |

### Chronic Absenteeism Performance Level Color Scheme

The combination of an LEA’s or school’s “Status” and “Change” determines an Indicator’s performance category, which are represented by five ranked colors or Performance Levels:

* Blue (highest)
* Green
* Yellow
* Orange
* Red (lowest)

Each indicator has its own distinct Performance Level color scheme for the five-by-five colored grid, which is adopted by the SBE along with the status and change cut points.

The SBE adopted the Chronic Absenteeism Performance Level color scheme for five-by-five colored grid as shown in Table 3.

#### Table 3: Chronic Absenteeism Performance Levels (Colors)

| **Performance Level** | **Increased Significantly** | **Increased** | **Maintained** | **Declined** | **Declined Significantly** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Very Low** | Yellow | Green | Blue | Blue | Blue |
| **Low** | Orange | Yellow | Green | Green | Blue |
| **Medium** | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Green | Green |
| **High** | Red | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Yellow |
| **Very High** | Red | Red | Red | Orange | Yellow |

To receive a blue Performance Level, an LEA, school or student group would either need a status of very low and a change level of maintained, declined or declined significantly, or a status of low and a change level of declined significantly. Conversely, an LEA, school or student group would receive a red Performance Level with a status level of high and a change level of increased significantly, or a status level of very high and a change level of maintained, increased, or increased significantly.

### Chronic Absenteeism Indicator on the Dashboard

The above combinations of status cut points, change cut points, and the performance level color scheme create the full Chronic Absenteeism Five-by-Five, as shown in Table 4.

#### Table 4: Chronic Absenteeism Five-by-Five

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Performance Level** | **Increased Significantly***from Prior Year (by greater than 3.0%)* | **Increased***from Prior Year (by 0.5% up to 3.0%)* | **Maintained***from Prior Year (declined or increased by less than 0.5%)* | **Declined***from Prior Year (by 0.5% to less than 3.0%)* | **Declined Significantly***from Prior Year (by 3.0% or more)* |
| **Very Low***2.5% or less in Current Year* | Yellow | Green | Blue | Blue | Blue |
| **Low***More than 2.5% to 5.0% in Current Year* | Orange | Yellow | Green | Green | Blue |
| **Medium***More than 5.0% to 10.0% in Current Year* | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Green | Green |
| **High***More than 10.0% to 20.0% in Current Year* | Red | Orange | Orange | Yellow | Yellow |
| **Very High***More than 20.0% in Current Year* | Red | Red | Red | Orange | Yellow |

## *Options Available to the State Board of Education to Modify the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator*

As detailed in the March 2023 accountability SBE item (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr23/documents/mar23item03.docx>), California’s chronic absenteeism rate increased from 14.3 percent in 2020–21 to 30 percent in 2021–22, mirroring trends in other states. The data collection period for these data is ongoing; opening in May and closing in August for students enrolled in California public schools in the 2022–23 school year.

Over the past six months, CDE has participated in numerous listening sessions and presentations dedicated to reducing chronic absenteeism. The CDE continues to assist county offices of education who are actively supporting LEAs that were determined to be eligible for assistance, in part, due to their performance on the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator. In addition, the CDE has engaged in direct conversations with other states who use this metric in their accountability systems and has also consulted with the U.S. Department of Education on this issue. A national study on the use of these data in state accountability systems is described in a June 2023 publication titled, “Monitoring Data Matters Even More: A Review of State Attendance Data Policy and Practice in School Year 2022–23,” by Attendance Works (<https://www.attendanceworks.org/monitoring-data-matters-even-more-a-review-of-state-attendance-data-policy-and-practice-in-school-year-2022-23/>). In light of the current discussion by the SBE, it is important to uplift one of the report’s key findings: “States are resuming use of chronic absence as a school accountability metric, but the pandemic has complicated its use.”

With this context in mind, the CDE developed short-term and long-term options and considerations for each option for the SBE to review and discuss at their July meeting.

*Note: Due to the timing of the request for this item, these options have not been vetted through the CDE’s technical or policy workgroups that the CDE depends on for critical feedback on the validity and reliability of the options being considered.*

### Short-Term Modifications (for implementation on the 2023 Dashboard)

* Option 1a: Modify the Cut Points for Status and/or Change Levels
* Option 1b: Modify the Performance Level Color Scheme for Five-by-Five Colored Grid
* Option 1c: Modify the Chronically Absent Student Calculation Methodology

### Long-Term Modifications (for implementation beyond the 2023 Dashboard)

* Option 2a: Modify the Granularity of Information Collected Around Student Absences
* Option 2b: Replace the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator from the Dashboard for Accountability Purposes

### Option 1a: Short-Term Modification: Modify the Cut Points for Status and/or Change Levels

This option would reset the cut points for the Chronic Absenteeism indicator and establish new cut points for either status levels, change levels or both. Changing the cut points for the Indicator would decrease the likelihood of a large number of schools and LEAs falling into the red performance level.

The SBE adopted a methodology of setting cut points for status and change levels based on the distributions of rates across LEAs in California. On the 2022 Dashboard, the distribution of status in Chronic Absenteeism deviated greatly from the status rates seen on the 2018 and 2019 Dashboard (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/jun23memoamard01.docx>).

Modifications to the cut points would need to be adopted at the September 2023 meeting to be used on the 2023 Dashboard, and subsequent Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and ESSA support determinations. The CDE will not have additional information from the 2022–23 school year data collection to share with the SBE to inform these choices; therefore, these decisions would need to rely on historical data. Additionally, any changes adopted to the cut points for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator would require a corresponding action by the SBE to adopt and submit an ESSA amendment to California’s State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education shortly thereafter.

### Option 1b: Short-Term Modification: Modify the Performance Level Color Scheme for Five-by-Five Colored Grid

This option would modify the colors that populate each box in the adopted five-by-five color grid that results in performance level determinations for Chronic Absenteeism. This option allows the SBE to directly adjust the number of red and orange boxes available for LEAs, schools, and student groups. For instance, a change to the color of the Red box for the status/change combination of “High”/”Increased Significantly” to Orange, in order to remove the possibility of receiving a Red for all LEAs, schools, and student groups that received a status of “High.”

Modifications to the color scheme would need to be adopted at the September 2023 meeting to be used on the 2023 Dashboard, and subsequent LCFF and ESSA support determinations. The CDE will not have additional information from the 2022–23 school year data collection to share with the SBE to inform these choices; therefore, these decisions would need to rely on historical data. Additionally, any changes adopted to the color scheme for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator would require a corresponding action by the SBE to adopt and submit an ESSA amendment to California’s State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education shortly thereafter.

### Option 1c: Short-Term Modification: Modify the Chronically Absent Student Calculation Methodology

This option modifies the student-level calculation that determines whether a student is counted as chronically absent. The definition of chronic absenteeism currently used in California includes all absences and is codified in *Education Code* Section 60901. As an example, the SBE could modify the formula by removing excused absences from the calculation, which would alter the calculation and create a chronic truancy rate. While the CDE publicly reports on Absences by Reason (i.e., unexcused absences, excused absences, etc.), these data were not collected, nor were they intended, for high-stakes determinations as stand-alone data points as described in this proposed option.

Modifications to the student-level calculation would need to be adopted at the September 2023 meeting to be used on the 2023 Dashboard, and subsequent LCFF and ESSA support determinations. The CDE will not have additional information from the 2022–23 school year data collection to share with the SBE to inform these choices; therefore, these decisions would need to rely on historical data. The SBE would also need to adopt new cut points for status and change based on the distribution of LEA scores using the revised student-level calculation methodology. Additionally, these changes to both the student-level calculation and cut points for the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator would require a corresponding action by the SBE to adopt and submit an ESSA amendment to California’s State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education shortly thereafter.

### Option 2a: Long-Term Modification: Modify the Granularity of Information Collected Around Student Absences

This option requires the SBE to request that the CDE increase the information that is gathered around student absences within the CALPADS data file. Presently, there is no detail submitted through CALPADS about absences other than the generic categories of Days Absent Excused (In-Person), Days Absent Unexcused (In-Person), Out-of-School Suspension Days and Non-ADA-Generating Independent Study Days. For example, SBE could request additional details on the reasons for each Excused Absence. This would allow the SBE to modify the student-level calculation of chronic absenteeism by selectively excluding certain categories of absences.

Current absenteeism data is gathered through the same file and mechanism as Average Daily Attendance (ADA) data, and any changes to this mechanism would require extensive work. This work includes, but is not limited to, developing definitions for the additional details on the reason for the absences, training LEAs on the new data collection metrics, and developing the respective reports in the data system. Therefore, modifications to the collection of absence data would take a minimum of two additional collection years to complete and would become available in 2024–25 at the earliest. This data would not affect performance level determinations and subsequent LCFF and ESSA support determinations until the 2026 Dashboard. Additionally, changes to the calculation of chronic absenteeism would need to be approved by the SBE and would require a corresponding action by the SBE to adopt and submit an ESSA amendment to California’s State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education.

### Option 2b: Long-Term Modification: Replace the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator on the Dashboard for Accountability Purposes

This option replaces the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator on future Dashboards. Within ESSA, California has identified Chronic Absenteeism as the additional academic indicator for grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Therefore, the SBE would need to adopt an additional academic measure for the Dashboard to maintain compliance with federal accountability requirements under ESSA. The Chronic Absenteeism Indicator would remain on the Dashboard until it could be replaced with a new measure.

Timing on this modification is variable, as the SBE would need to decide which new Indicator it would like to create. If the Indicator was created based on existing data collected in CALPADS, then such an indicator could be available as soon as the 2024 Dashboard. However, if there was not data readily available, the CDE would need to begin a new data collection, and such an indicator would not be available until the 2026 Dashboard at the earliest. Additionally, the replacement of an Indicator on the ESSA State Plan would require a corresponding action by the SBE to adopt and submit an ESSA amendment to California’s State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education.