ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENCE IN OUSD: A COLLECTIVE IMPACT STRATEGY

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Perry Chen
Update: July 2020
PROJECT SCOPE & METHODS
GOAL: In January 2019, the Youth Ventures Joint Powers Authority, with generous funding from Kaiser Permanente, commissioned a report on chronic absence in the Oakland Unified School District. The goal is to inform recommendations for a cross-sector, cross-industry collective impact effort.

METHODS: This research effort involved: review of literature on efforts to address chronic absence, review of relevant data sources (OUSD student attendance, student achievement, environmental stressors), systems level leader interviews (e.g., for history, analytical observations, current efforts) and parent focus groups.

REPORT: The 63-page report includes root causes of chronic absence drawn from the literature, relevant data, and key learnings from stakeholder interviews. It presents a series of tiered opportunities for action aligned with root causes and the literature on best practices, an early list of proposed actions identified by the YVJPA Impact Table Co-Chairs and Project Managers, and a series of recommendations related to implementation and conditions for success.

ADDENDUM: Upon completion and review of the above report, YVJPA Impact Table Co-Chairs and Project Managers participated in additional information gathering exercises to help inform a collective impact strategy; activities included panel discussions with attendance and discipline systems leaders and school-based practitioners, as well as several collaborative working sessions. The learnings and recommendations resulting from this process are captured in a memo that serves as an addendum to the originally commissioned report.
DATA & FINDINGS
CHRONIC ABSENCE (CA) DEFINED

**What is Chronic Absence?**

Chronic absence is missing so much school for any reason that a student is academically at risk. Attendance Works recommends defining it as **missing 10% or more of school for any reason.**

**Excused absences** + **Unexcused absences** + **Suspensions** → **Chronic Absence**

Chronic absence is different from **truancy** (unexcused absences only) or **average daily attendance** (how many students show up to school each day).

www.attendanceworks.org
SCHOOL AGE IMPACTS

Chronic Absence = Warning Sign of Academic Risk

Student Attendance is Strongly Associated with Academic Success

PK-1st Grade: Students who attend regularly in the early grades perform better on measures of academic and social and emotional capacities.

3rd Grade: Students who attend school regularly are more likely to be able to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.

Middle School Success: Students who attend school regularly are more likely to have passing grades in middle school.

High School Completion: Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to persist in college and graduate.

College Completion: Students who attend school regularly in high school are more likely to graduate from high school.

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Chronic Absence is associated with...

- Substance Abuse
- Violence
- Criminal Behavior
- Poor Mental Health Outcomes
- Teen Pregnancy
- Future Unemployment

FUTURE IMPACTS
2017-2018:
- 35,500 students in OUSD
- Average of 2000 students absent per day
- $56 / day per student equals about $112,000 / day in missed revenue
- OUSD missed out on about $20,000,000

2018 -2019:
- 35,000 students in OUSD
- Average of 1,645 students absent per day
- $56 / per student equals about $92,000 / day in missed revenue
- OUSD is projected to miss out on $16,500,000 at this rate
# OUSD CA - PORTAL & ANNUAL #s

## Percent Of Students - By Attendance Group

### As Of June 7, 2018

Data Last Refreshed On: June 27, 2018

Select Academic Year(s) (Multiple values) ▼
Individual Grade(s) Included (All) ▼
Individual School(s) Included (Multiple values) ▼
View by District Or School District ▼
View By Grade Group All Grades ▼
Select School(s) All Schools ▼
Select Grade Group(s) All Grades ▼
View By Student Group All Students ▼

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>District Or School</th>
<th>Grade Group</th>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Group Total</th>
<th>72.7%</th>
<th>16.2%</th>
<th>8.7%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>All Grades</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35,683</td>
<td>N = 25,930</td>
<td>N = 5,785</td>
<td>N = 3,087</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>All Grades</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35,557</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>All Grades</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35,582</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
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</table>
OUSD CA - BY GRADE, BY RACE/ETHNICITY

OUSD Attendance Status, Overall, 2017-2018
- Satisfactory: 66%
- At Risk: 19%
- Moderate: 11%
- Severe: 4%

OUSD Attendance Status By Grade Group, 2017-2018
- Gr TK-5: Satisfactory 66%, At Risk 21%, Moderate 10%, Severe 3%
- Gr 6-12: Satisfactory 71%, At Risk 18%, Moderate 9%, Severe 3%
- Gr 9-12: Satisfactory 62%, At Risk 17%, Moderate 12%, Severe 9%

OUSD Attendance Status By Race/Ethnicity, 2017-2018
- Latino: Satisfactory 64%, At Risk 21%, Moderate 11%, Severe 4%
- Afr Amer: Satisfactory 53%, At Risk 23%, Moderate 16%, Severe 8%
- Nat Amer: Satisfactory 48%, At Risk 27%, Moderate 16%, Severe 9%
- Pac Isl: Satisfactory 47%, At Risk 23%, Moderate 21%, Severe 8%
- Asian: Satisfactory 84%, At Risk 11%, Moderate 4%, Severe 1%
- White: Satisfactory 79%, At Risk 17%, Moderate 4%, Severe 1%
14.2% of OUSD students received special education services, but of chronically absent students, **23.2% received special education services.**

Whereas only 0.6% of OUSD students were Foster youth, 1.1% of chronically absent students were Foster youth. **25% of all foster youth are chronically absent.**

2.2% of all OUSD students were homeless, but of chronically absent students, **5% were homeless.**
OUSD CA – GEOGRAPHIC HEAT MAP

Chronic Absence Map: Schoolwide Percent
Percent Chronic Absent For 2018-19 As Of 1/29/2019  (Use selections to the right to limit schools and students included)
Network(s): All
School Type(s): All

Schoolwide Percent Chronic Absent Groups:
- 5% or less
- Between 5% and 10%
- Between 10% and 15%
- 15% or More

School location point sizes are larger or smaller depending on the size of the student body enrolled, as controlled for by filter selection above.
KEY FINDINGS: 
REASONS FOR CHRONIC ABSENCE IN OUSD

- Relationships & Trust
- Transportation
- Mental Health, Trauma, Anxiety
- Crime & Safety
- Communications
- Navigation of Resources
PAST & PRESENT EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CA IN OUSD

**Efforts**

- Case Management
- Support with coordination and navigation of services
- Information, data tracking and incentives
- Strong school culture and high-quality instruction

**Challenges**

- Systemic challenges related to poverty, inequality and trauma
- Budget constraints
- Siloed interventions, not enough data sharing
- Staff and leadership turnover
BEST PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING CA

Correcting Poor Mental Accounting

Wide-Scale Communication Campaigns

Cross-Agency Data Sharing & Analysis

Data-Driven Initiatives to Address Systems Gaps

Mentorship
RECOMMENDATIONS
TIERED APPROACH TO COMBATING CA

- **TIER 1**: Students missing 5-9% **(at risk)** + Students missing less than 5% **(satisfactory)**
  - Recognize good and improved attendance
  - Educate & engage students and families
  - Monitor attendance data & set goals
  - Establish positive & engaging school climate
  - Identify & address common attendance barriers

- **TIER 2**: Students missing 10-19% **(moderate chronic absence)**
  - Provided personalized early outreach
  - Meet to develop a tailored action plan
  - Connect to a caring mentor

- **TIER 3**: Students missing 20% or more **(severe chronic absence)**
  - Intensive case management with coordination of public agency and legal response as needed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1 (universal; accessible to all Oakland students and families)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure that students and families, at all points of entry, feel welcome and culturally represented</td>
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<td>• Ensure that all service providers receive training in trauma informed care</td>
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<td>• City-wide attendance information and championing campaigns, e.g., TV, radio, posters, rallies at critical points in the school year (beg. of year, winter break, flu season, spring break)</td>
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<td>• Campaign to promote mental health and wellness, particularly for communities who may be unsure of symptoms of mental illness, or who may consider the subject taboo</td>
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<td>• Ensure all school sites have budget for good or improved attendance incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduce positive attendance practices and connect with families at critical transition points (Entering K, entering middle school, entering high school)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop city-wide services navigation website</td>
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<td>• Ensure restorative justice programs receive sustained funding, and that programming and support are scaled to reach all schools</td>
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<th>Tier 2 (targeted; accessible to Oakland students and families with above average need, i.e., families experiencing poverty)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Launch or reinforce pre-existing mentorship models to ensure sufficient capacity to support students with moderate to severe chronic absence</td>
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<td>• Partner with Oakland Housing Authority, non-profits and other CBOS to build upon existing or emerging place-based initiatives; include efforts to ensure access to affordable, secure housing and vocational training</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop or expand upon pre-existing cross-agency data sharing efforts to support efficient case-management</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conduct study of barriers to county, city, or school-district social service uptake; pilot approaches to streamline processes, like applications for services, means testing, etc.</td>
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<td>• Partner with school district to expand upon current home visit initiatives</td>
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<td>• Investigate impacts of AC-transit pass pilot; consider (means tested) free transit passes for all school-aged children and their families</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure adequate support for families managing asthma; include education and advocacy with health care providers and school sites to ensure families feel confident in asthma management plan and partners</td>
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<td>• Ensure sufficient resources for adequate translation services at critical points of service</td>
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<tr>
<th>Tier 3 (intensive; accessible to Oakland students and families with greatest need, i.e., students experiencing homelessness)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure highest need students and families have access to intensive case-management (including tracking attendance year-on-year and managing entire families with multiple chronically absent students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allocate budget for flexible dollars for intensive need families in crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explore ways to minimize transitions for high-risk youth (homeless, foster)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explore ways for high-need high-school aged students to earn while they learn</td>
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Initial YVJPA Co-Chair and PM Recommendations

Priority Strategies:
- A multi-tiered information campaign to build awareness around chronic absenteeism among students and families
- Approaches to building positive relationships and trust between students, families, and school staff

Guiding Principles:
- Chronic absenteeism is a proxy for social determinants of health that impact the ability of children to attend school regularly
- Decisions about advancing this work should be based on evidence and reflect the needs of the communities in which the work is happening
- Potential strategies must be vetted by community members who will be affected, with adjustments made as needed
- Potential strategies must also be vetted by principals, teachers, and district staff
- It is important to carefully consider who the most trusted messengers are for families (e.g. health providers, faith-based leaders, barbershops, peers) - Information campaign messages should easily understood by and relevant to people at greatest risk
The information gathered by impact tables over the past year has consistently emphasized the importance of building trusting relationships between schools, students, and families in order to improve school attendance. While many talented school district staff are working on this, more human resources are needed. Future collective impact efforts should explore a collaboration between local government, OUSD, and private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners to bring more human resources to school sites in order to build and maintain these critical relationships. For example, each city and county agency within the JPA could hire one community school manager, attendance liaison, or social worker to support a high-need school. City and county agencies could also partner with school sites to provide students and families with easier access to needed social resources, including housing, employment, and benefit enrollment. Additionally, OUSD students are an untapped resource with respect to providing support and positive relationships for each other. With thoughtful training, students can provide mentoring and wellness support to fellow students. This approach could be highly effective at improving school culture and improving mental health among students.
QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION
APPENDICES
Key Systems Leaders and Stakeholders Interviews

- Misha Karigaca, OUSD Attendance
- Shelia White, OUSD Attendance
- Andrea Bustamante, OUSD Community Schools
- Ali Metzer, OUSD Community Schools
- Raquel Jimenez, OUSD Office of Equity, Family & Student Engagement
- Christie Herrera, OUSD ECE
- Monica Thomas, OUSD Regional Superintendent (Elem, Region 3)
- Vinh Trinh, OUSD High School Network
- Neena Bawa, OUSD Special Education
- Jennifer Tam, OUSD Foster Youth
- Trish Anderson, OUSD McKinney Vento Program/Homeless Youth

- Cliff Hong, Roosevelt Middle School
- Nima Tahai, Formerly Garfield Elementary School
- Lisa Warhuus, Center for Healthy School and Communities
- Theresa Drenick, District Attorney’s Office
- Eric Johnson, Oakland Housing Authority
- Jennifer Caban, Formerly City of Oakland
- Sandy Taylor, City of Oakland
- Sanam Jorjani, Oakland Literacy Coalition
- Chris Stoner Mertz, Lincoln Child Center
- Dr. Nyeisha Dewitt, Oakland Natives Give Back

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUSD</th>
<th>Public Sector Partner</th>
<th>Non-Profit Partner</th>
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Key Limitations for Phase 1
Scope, Confidentiality, Maturing Systems, etc...

- Did not have access to **attendance clerk notes** (i.e., reasons for absence)
- Did not have **student intervention notes**; OUSD has limited and fragmented student data collection systems
- Was not able to conduct **cross-agency data analysis of chronically absent students**; data sharing is extremely limited
- Was not able to interview **students**, and was only able to conduct a few focus groups with **families** (September 2019)
# Major Causes of Chronic Absence

## Barriers
- Illness, both chronic and acute
- Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care
- Family responsibilities
- Trauma
- Unsafe path to/from school
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Frequent school changes
- Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems
- Inequitable access to resources due to bias & discrimination.

## Negative School Experiences
- Struggling academically and behaviorally
- Ineffective or harmful interventions
- Bored
- Social challenges
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Harsh, biased disciplinary practices especially for students of color
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

## Lack of Engagement
- Lack of or inequitable access to challenging, culturally responsive, engaging instruction & enrichment
- Lack of academic, emotional and behavioral support
- No meaningful or negative relationships to adults in the school
- Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/no future plans
- Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes

## Misconceptions
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren’t a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions are not relevant

Source: Attendance Works “Seize the Data Opportunity in California: Using Chronic Absence to Improve Educational Outcomes”
What we heard from Oakland’s leaders...

"incentives work, but resources for this are limited"

"for those who have experienced trauma, particularly older students, larger comprehensive high schools can be overwhelming"

"communication is challenging when there is an absence of trust with schools or other institutional figures"

"language barriers exist; translation services limited"

"transportation is a challenge"

"mental health challenges pervasive"

"many older students feel that their school doesn’t provide opportunities aligned to their interests"

"for foster youth, too many placement transitions make school a low priority"

"Families worried about basic needs have a hard time tracking attendance"

"families in crisis often need emergency flexible dollars, which are very limited"

"many older students feel that they need to make money"

"often hard to navigate public resources; no centralized source of information"
Talking with Families

Overview:
In September and October 2019, Perry Chen, project manager for the Education Impact Table, and Mischa Karigaca, coordinator of OUSD’s Office of Attendance and Discipline Support Services, coordinated and led two focus groups with parents and guardians of elementary, middle, and high school students identified as chronically absent.

Each focus group consisted of 4-6 guardians who had direct experience with OUSD’s response to chronic absenteeism, ranging from on-site school meetings to engagements with school or district attendance review teams SART/SARB (School Attendance Review Team or Board) to truancy court. The focus groups included mothers, fathers, grandparents, and guardians of students in elementary, middle, and high school.

All the attendees understood that this process was not part of the chronic absence process, but an opportunity for families to share their stories and help us to learn and improve.
## CHRONIC ABSENCE & ATTENDANCE • FAMILY FOCUS GROUPS

### WHO
- Experience with the Chronic Absence Process (progressive from school notices, meetings, SART, SARB, and courts)
- Elementary, Middle, High
- Single Parents with little resources
- Working Poor

### WHAT
- Range of Consistent Trauma around children & students (domestic violence, drug usage, self-harm, life-altering accidents)
- Transportation (significant distances, lack of car)
- Sleep Schedules (work schedules)
- Basic Needs (clothing, food, shelter)
- Peer Pressures (older youth)

### HOW
- Letters & Notices of Chronic Absence (shock, shame, surprise)
- Experiences at School - helpful, polite, family (provide bus passes, volunteer to pick up, social workers/therapists)
- Experiences at District (SARB) - anxious, questioning, trying to pinpoint the why's
- Experiences at Court - supportive, engaging, open opportunities & solutions, range of supports

### QUICK TAKEAWAYS:
- Parents care, Parents trying, Parents frustrated, Parents feel shame ... Parents open and sharing and supportive
- Technical Improvements (earlier & regular notice with context, earlier range of supports)
- Relationships @ every level – how is as important as what (if not more)
TELL ME ABOUT YOUR KIDS

• My daughter went to Westlake Middle School for 6th through 8th grade. Started out being honor roll and straight A student from 6th to 7th grade... my kid is not a kid who can just sit. She’s a hands-on type kid. She has to stay busy. She gets bored fast. Cause her mind is running. So she likes science. She needs to be doing something. With her siblings? She’s good. She’s just bossy!
• My kids are 10 and 5 ... and I’m their dad and I’m blind. My kids to me are the world. They’re the world to me. I like coming home, sitting down and playing with them. Coloring. Having little tea parties. They just make my day, period. I wouldn’t change anything. If I could have them in school everyday, I would. But I do need help.
• I have a 9 year old, she’s a shy little girl. And an 8 year old, he’s an active little one! Really communicative, he likes to help everybody. He’s a loveable boy.
• He’s a good kid. He’s shy, introverted. Going through puberty, has attitude occasionally. But he’s a good kid. I home-schooled him. By the time he got to OUSD, he was put a grade above his level. He’s only 13 going into high school. He was speaking by 16 months. He identified colors, animals, all kinds of things.

SHARE SOMETHING YOUR KIDS SAY or DO THAT MAKES YOU CRACK UP

• Lots of things, you know, they’re kids. My son, he’s a silly butt. Always doing things he’s not supposed to. Getting hurt, all he does is laugh. They’ve got their moments.
• The letters. Mother’s day, valentine’s day. My boy, he likes to wiggle his teeth, he wants them to come out so the tooth fairy can come!
• Mine is into the makeup. And they have those makeup tutorials, that YouTube stuff? So I’m down getting into that. And the dancing too. And then I get out there and try to be doing it with them too, cause I know it! Those are my fun times!
• Bunch of things my kids do to make me laugh. The five-year old, she’s such a lady! She’ll tell you straight up, “Daddy, I’m 68!” “Oh, you’re 68?” “Yes. And I remember my friends. I’ve been here before. And I’ve been over there.” Her funniness to be funny. Makes my day.
• He has an extreme sense of humor. He is so funny. He cracks me up all the time. I love my son.
# IN/OUT SCHOOL FACTORS Oakland CA (primary framework)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-School Factors</th>
<th>Out-of School Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Need for citywide resource directory to support advocacy and navigation efforts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for consistent, positive attendance</td>
<td>**Absence of trust in public service</td>
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<tr>
<td>recognition &amp; incentives</td>
<td>providers/other partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Absence of trust in school personnel</td>
<td><strong>Need for translation services to support case-management, navigation and advocacy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Need for translation services to support in-persn</td>
<td><strong>High-school students not eating breakfast, or nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>meetings and events</td>
<td>a regular basis*</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disciplinary practices resulting in</td>
<td><strong>Students experiencing depression</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>disproportionate rates of suspension</td>
<td><strong>Involvement with Juvenile Justice System</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High School Students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• High-school students do not feel school is</td>
<td><strong>Repeated exposure to violence and crime</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>engaging or relevant</td>
<td><strong>Mental health challenges associated with trauma</strong></td>
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<td>• High-school students do not feel engaged in</td>
<td><strong>Need for more tailored support for asthma management</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>decision-making processes</td>
<td><strong>Gentrification resulting in displacement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of data to understand reasons for</td>
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<tr>
<td>absence in grades 9-12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mismatch of school-site and student</td>
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<tr>
<td>interests amongst high school students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High-school students find facilities are</td>
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<td>outdated and uninviting</td>
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<td><strong>Families in East, West and Central Oakland</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students performing below grade-level in core</td>
<td><strong>Need for emergency flexible dollars during times of crisis</strong></td>
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<td>subjects</td>
<td><strong>High school age students need to earn money to support family during school hours</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Families Experiencing Poverty</strong></td>
<td><strong>Housing instability caused by rising housing costs, displacement &amp; gentrification</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of adequate and/or affordable</td>
<td><strong>Lack of opportunities for upskilling</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>transportation (despite open enrollment system)*</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students Receiving Special Education Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Misconceptions related to discipline and IEP</td>
<td><strong>Students have limited access to facilities for personal care and hygiene</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>process</td>
<td><strong>Transportation challenges due to high-mobility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Delays in student accommodations or alternative</td>
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<tr>
<td>placements</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students Experiencing Homelessness</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Placements often unaligned to interest or student-</td>
<td><strong>High-mobility impacts incentive to invest in schools</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>need (due to unique enrollment patterns)</td>
<td><strong>Case-manager priority is often basic needs (food, shelter, safety), leaving little capacity for educational supports and advocacy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foster Youth</strong></td>
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Additional Considerations

Our research unearthed several systems level issues that should be noted, particularly by OUSD, in continued efforts to combat and address chronic absence:

• Need to conduct cross-agency data analysis
• Need for sustained attention to attendance and attendance management capacity
• Need to develop alternative means for school district staff to communicate with parents regarding absences
• Need to consider priority school placement for students with high mobility rates
• School-based systemic barriers need to be addressed to ensure students feel welcomed and supported