Improving Student Attendance and Engagement

PACE Annual Conference
January 25, 2024

PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

Session objectives

- Explore the underlying reasons for high rates of absenteeism
- Learn about the current status of absenteeism in California and its differential impact on student groups and schools
- Gain insight into how community schools strategies and expanded learning opportunities can bolster attendance and engagement.

How is chronic absenteeism defined in CA?

Student absence rate $=$

$$\frac{\text{Days Absent Unexcused + Days Absent Excused + Out-of-School Suspension Days + Non-ADA-Generating Independent Study Days}}{\text{Expected Attendance Days}}$$

A student is considered "**chronically absent**" if they miss **10 percent or more** of their expected attendance days.

Chronic absenteeism rate $=$

$$\frac{\text{Number of Students Chronically Absent}}{\text{Number of Students Enrolled (for least 31 instructional days)}}$$

The Chronic Absenteeism Rate Indicator is one of several state indicators reported on the Dashboard. It represents the percentage of K-8 students who were chronically absent.
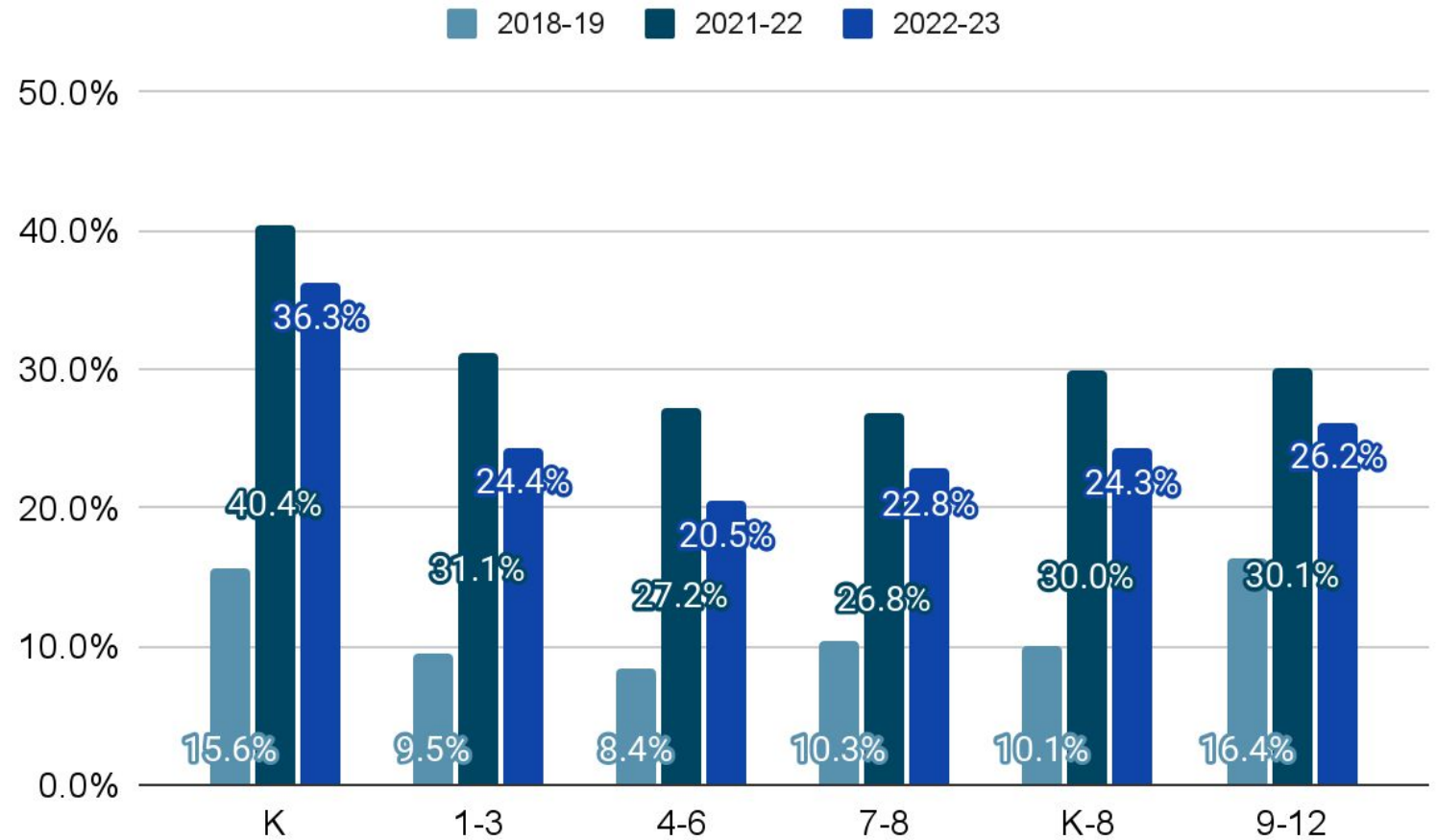
Chronic absenteeism remains high

Chronic absence has more than doubled. It has increased from 12.1% in 2018-19 to a high of 30% in 2021-22 with a 5.1% decrease to 24.9% in 2022-23.
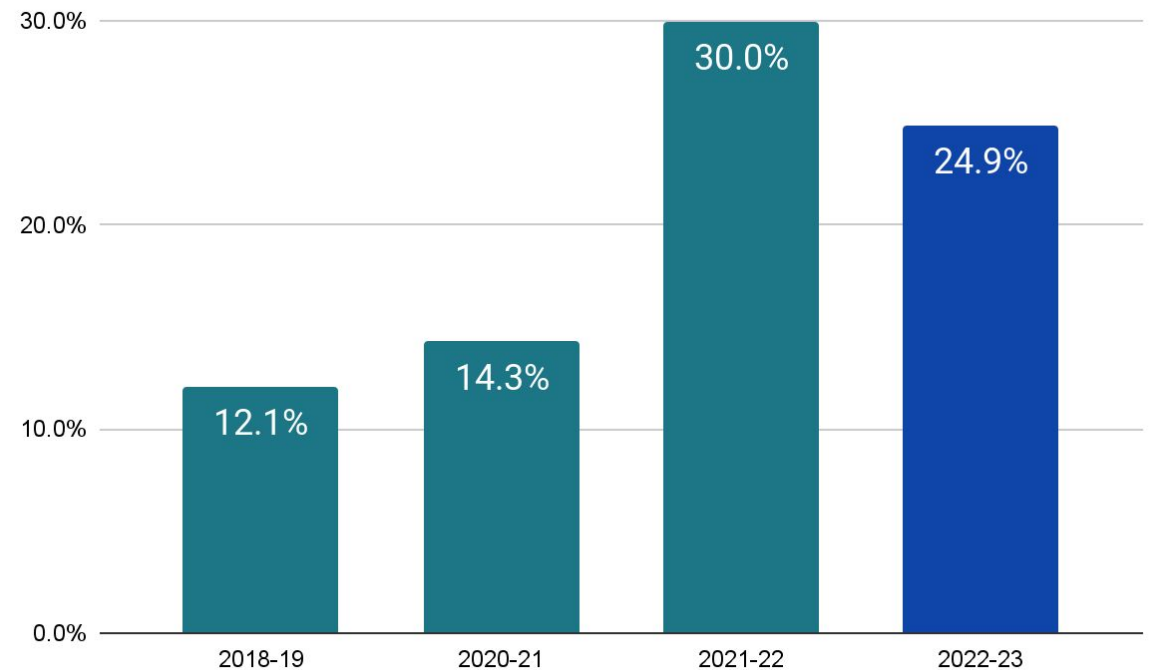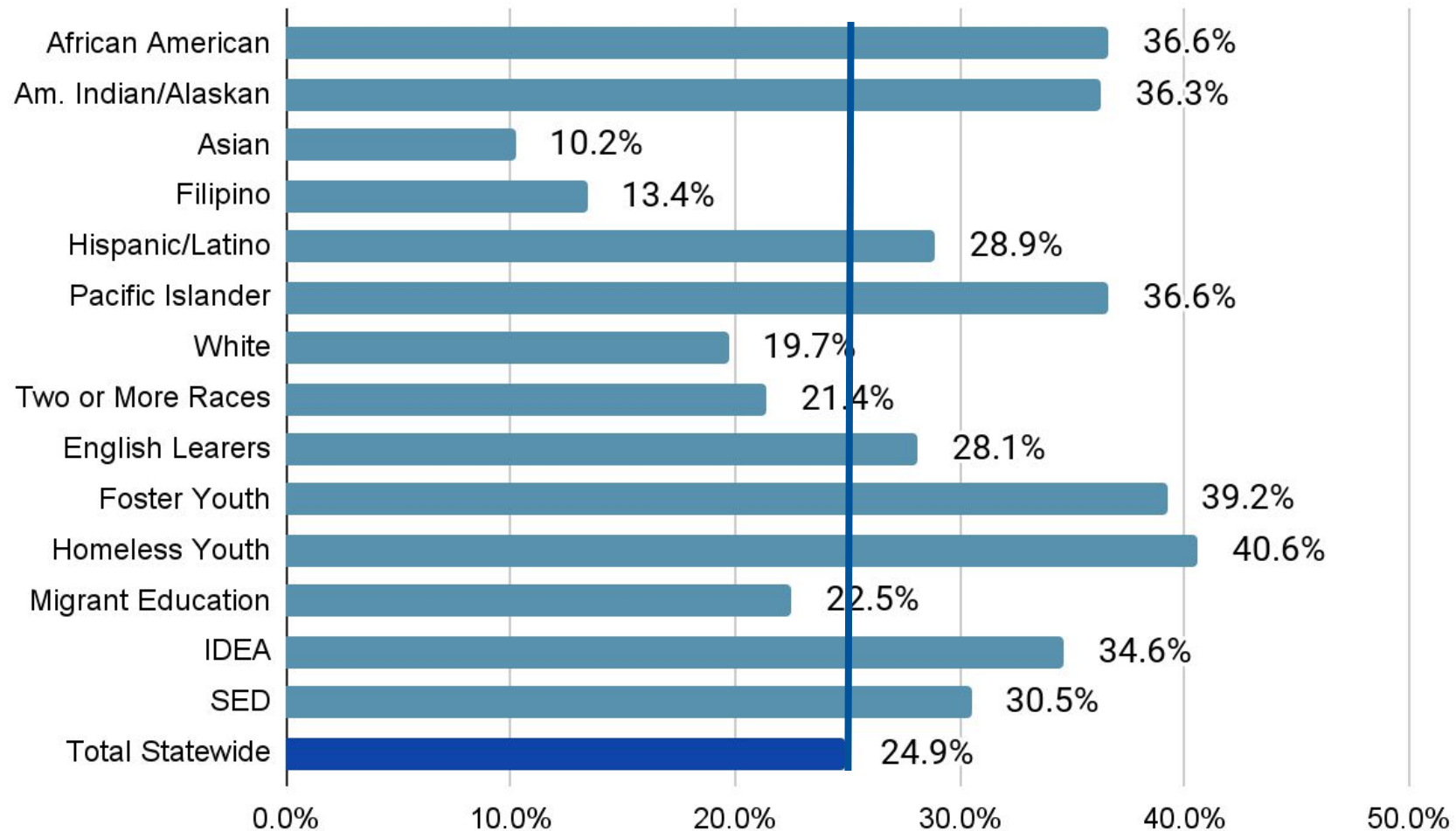

Source: CA Department of Education

Chronic absenteeism is highest in kindergarten

Absenteeism is now most prominent among kindergarteners.

Source: CA Department of Education

Chronic absenteeism varies by subgroup

Source: CA Department of Education

Self-Actualization — **Engaged learning**

Esteem — Students see **value** in school and how their effort will help them achieve their goals

Love and Belonging — Students have a sense of **belonging** and meaningful **relationships** with trusted adults and peers at school

Safety — Students **feel safe** from harm at school (e.g., safe from bullying and violence)

Physiological Needs — Students' **basic needs** are met (e.g., physical and mental health, food, housing, hygiene, transportation)

"**Why Aren't Students Showing Up for School?** Understanding the Complexity Behind Rising Rates of Chronic Absenteeism"

November 17, 2023
https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/why-arent-students-showing-school

PACE

Policy Analysis for California Education

Panelists

Panelists:

- Hedy Chang, Executive Director, Attendance Works
- James Bridgeforth, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX)
- Jessica Gunderson, Co-CEO, Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY)

Table Introductions

- Name
- Organization
- Why you chose to come to this breakout session

Hedy Chang

Executive Director, Attendance Works

Showing Up Matters for R.E.A.L.

It is an opportunity to:

✔ **Build Routines**

Daily attendance routines can reduce stress and create a sense of safety and security especially after chaotic transitions.

✔ **Increase Engagement**

Being in school helps build relationships with peers and school staff that nurture engagement.
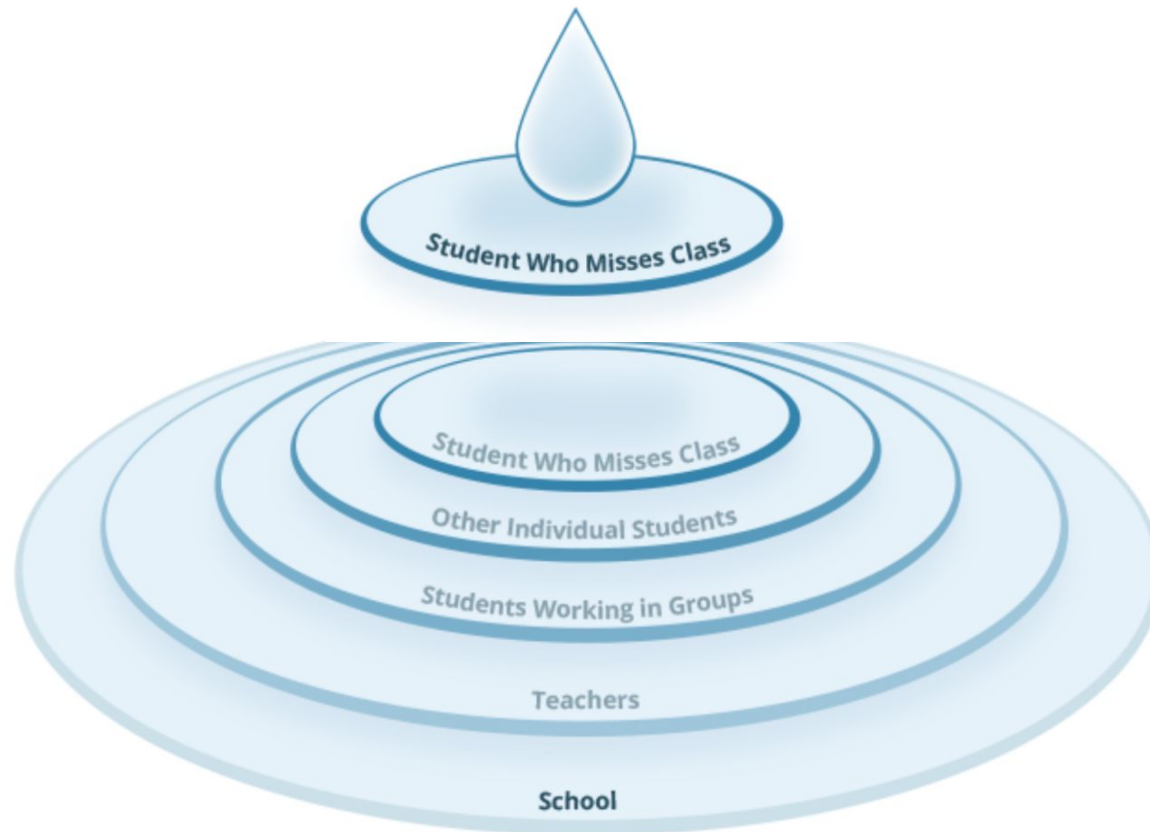
✔ **Provide Access to resources**

Schools provide access to meals, health and mental health services, tutoring, mentoring, technology, extra-curriculars (sports, clubs, music etc), afterschool and summer programs.

✔ **Support Learning**

Showing up to school regularly helps students become proficient in reading and math and graduate from high school.
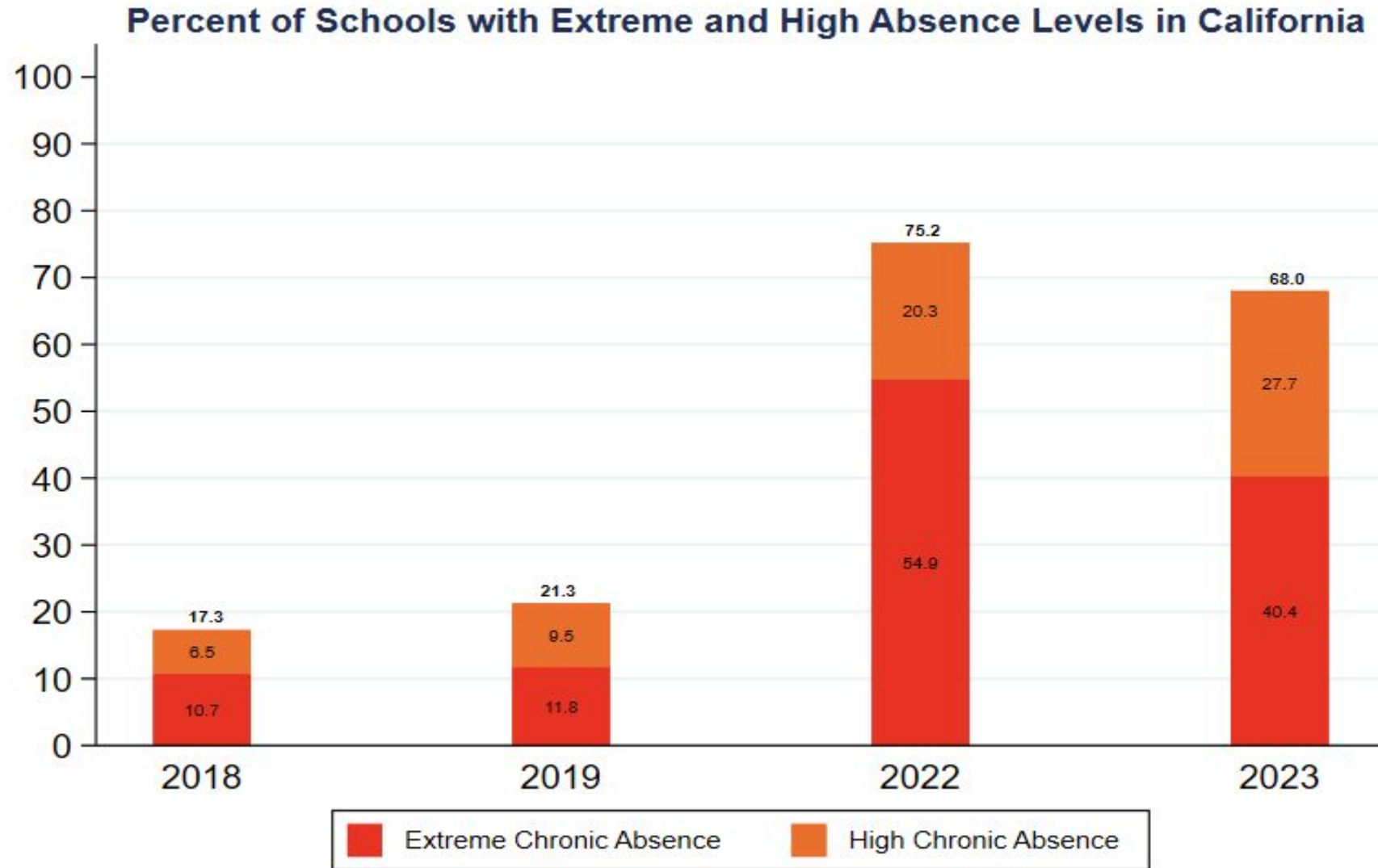
Find toolkit: https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/showing-up-matters-for-real/

Attendance Works ©

When a Student Misses School the Impact Ripples

Student Who Misses Class

Student Who Misses Class

Other Individual Students

Students Working in Groups

Teachers

School

2 out of 3 students attend a school with 20% or more absenteeism nationwide (*SY 2021-22*)

Attendance Works ©

In California, The Percent of Schools with High and Extreme Chronic Absenteeism Levels More Than Tripled Since the Pandemic

Percent of Schools with Extreme and High Absence Levels in California

Year	Extreme Chronic Absence	High Chronic Absence	Total
2018	10.7	6.5	17.3
2019	11.8	9.5	21.3
2022	54.9	20.3	75.2
2023	40.4	27.7	68.0

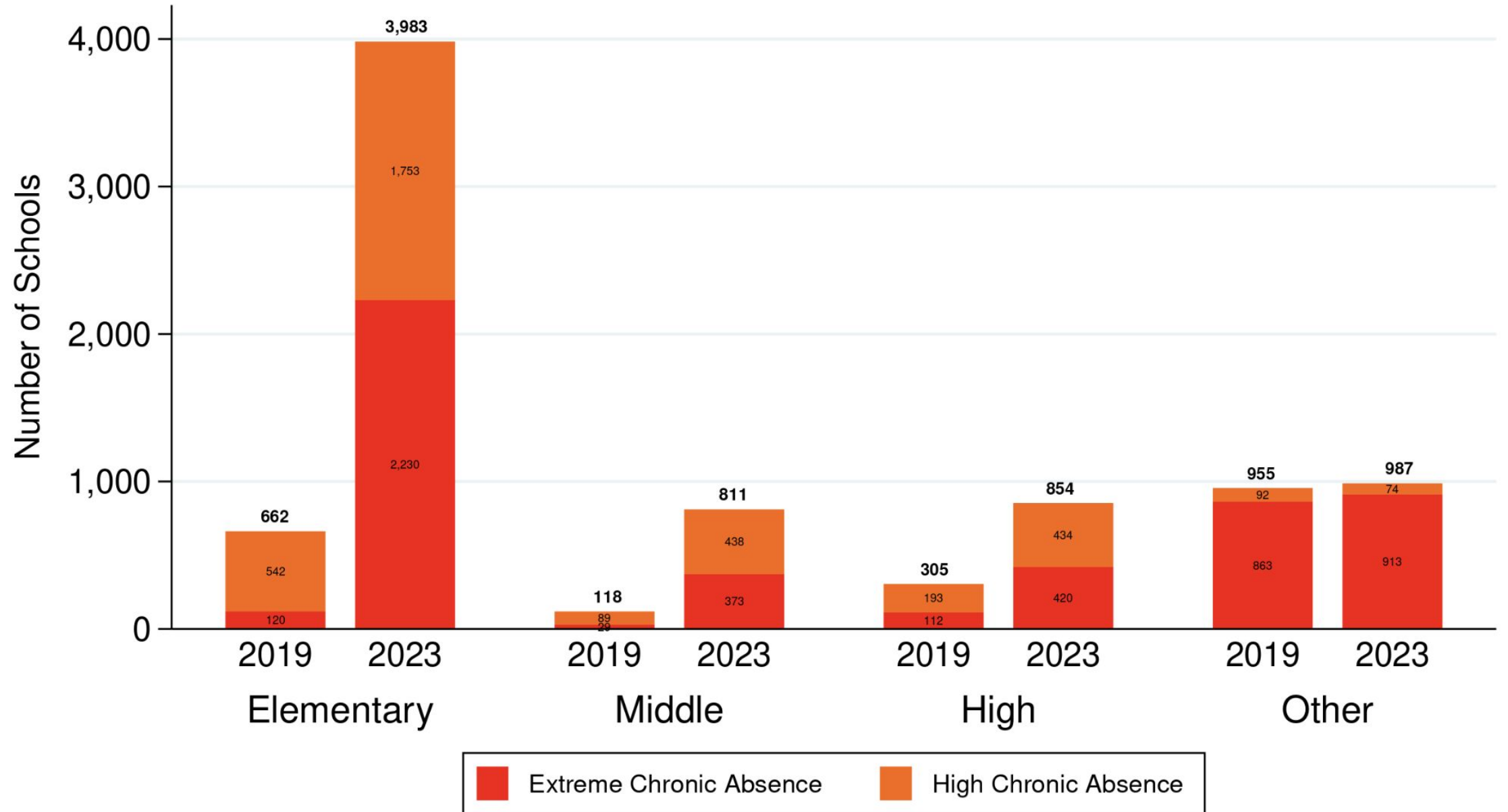Legend: Extreme Chronic Absence (red), High Chronic Absence (orange)

In California, Schools With Greater Percentages of Socio-economically Disadvantaged Students Had Much Higher Levels of Chronic Absenteeism in SY 2022-23
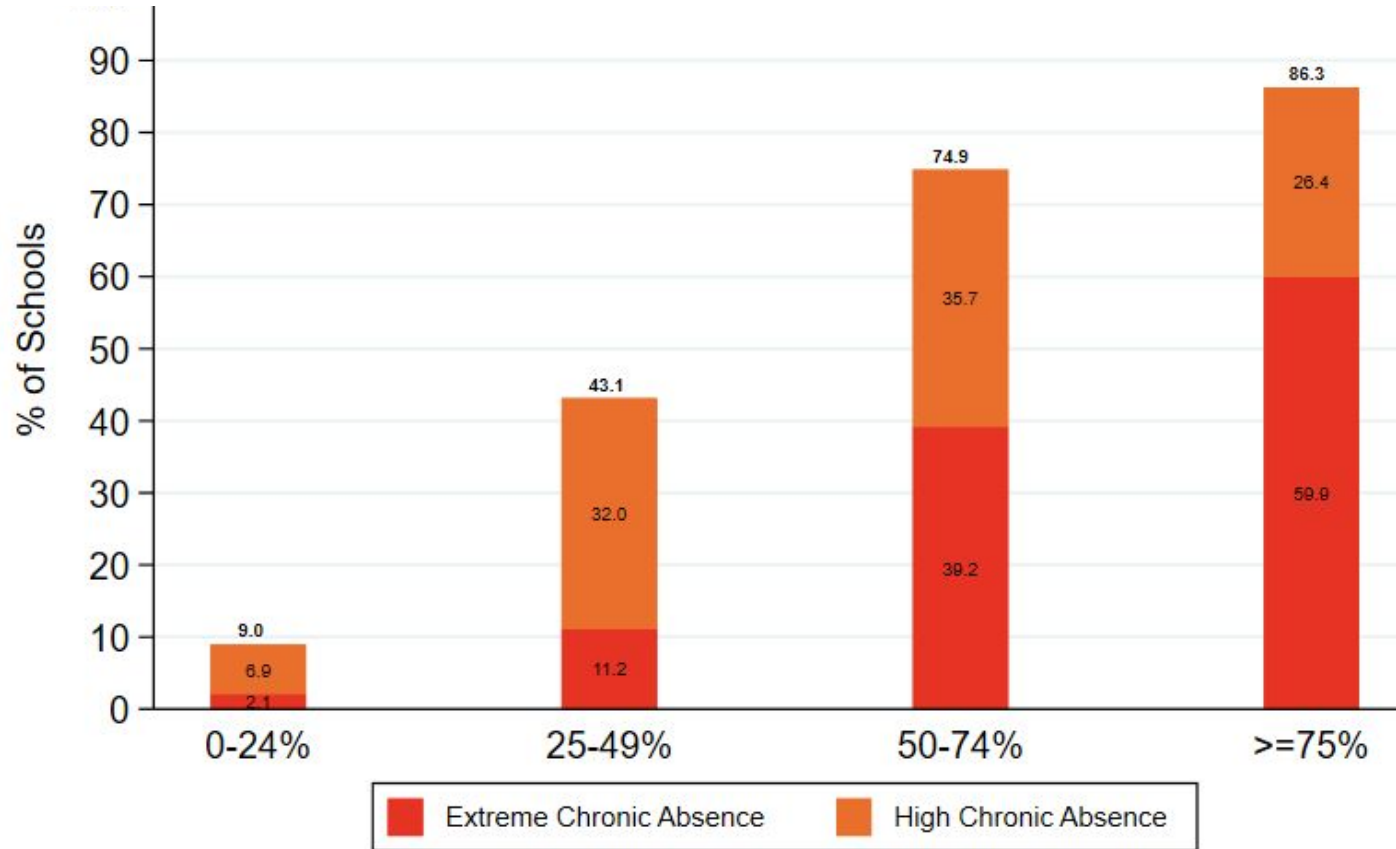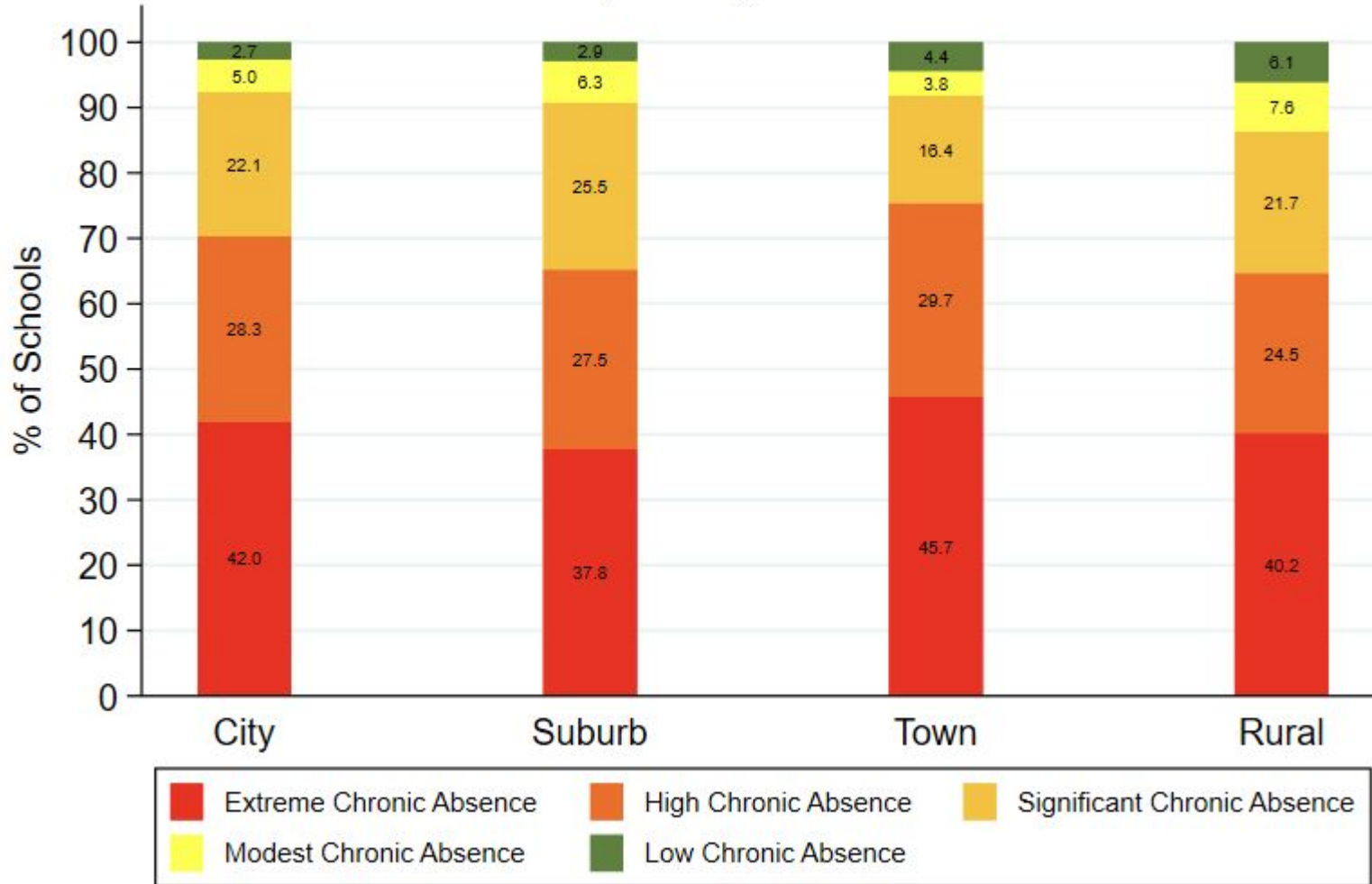
Schools with High and Extreme Absence Levels in California
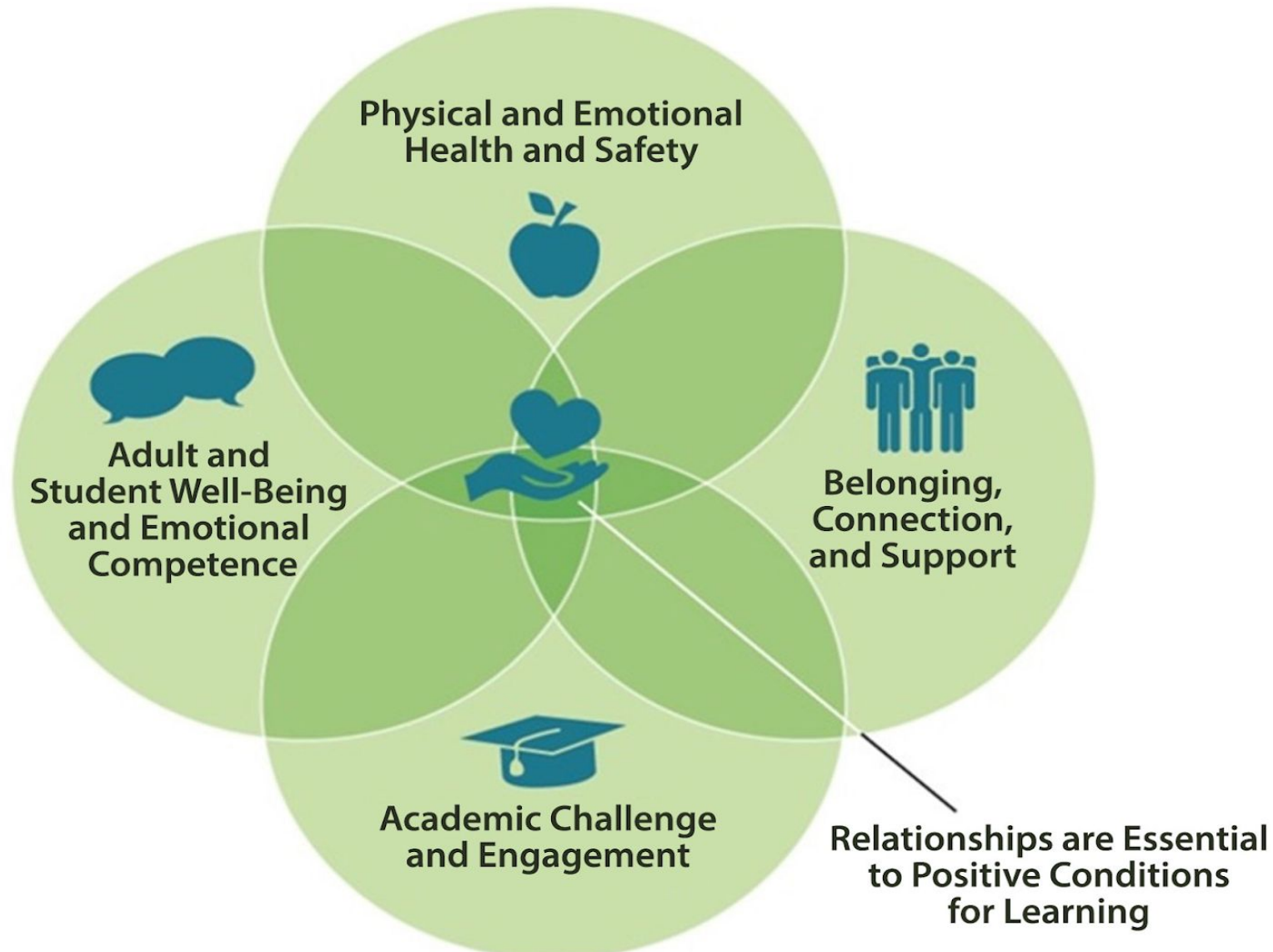By School Type SY 2018-19 and 2022-23

Schools by Chronic Absence Levels in California
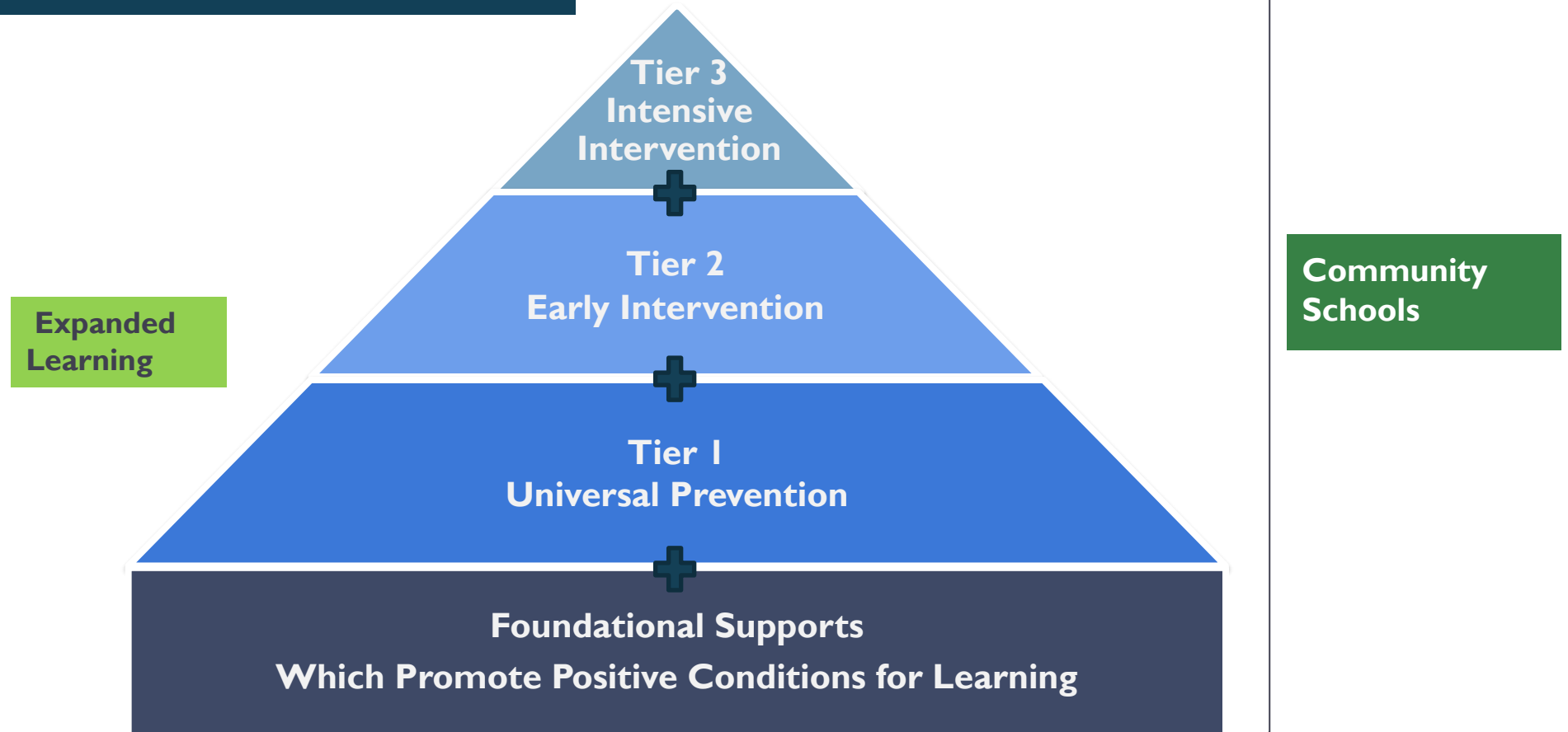### By Locale Type SY 2022-23

Every type of locality has a majority of schools with high and extreme levels of chronic absence; as well as a small percent of schools with much better attendance (potential bright spots)

High levels of chronic absence reflect an erosion in positive conditions for learning
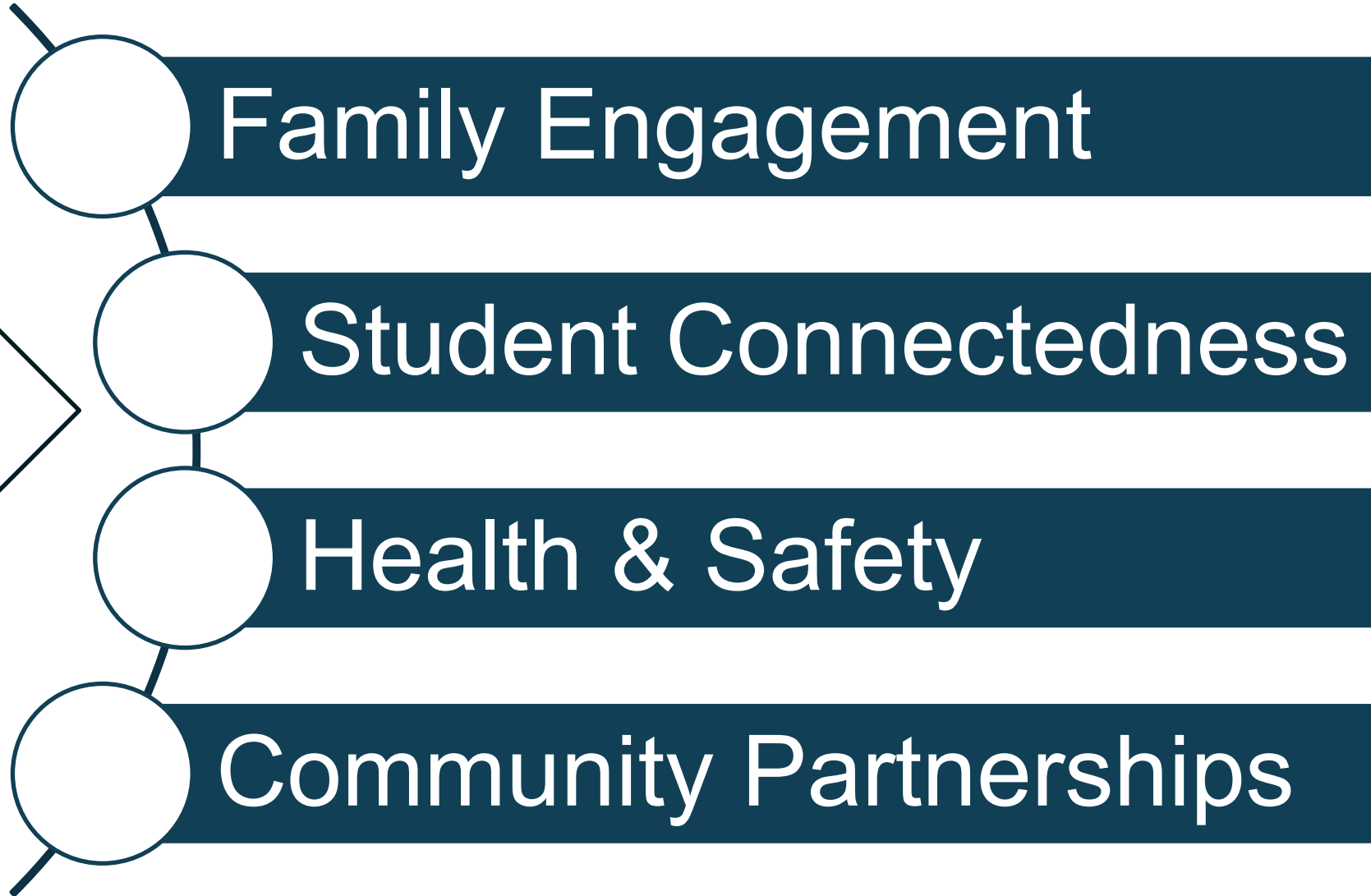

Physical and Emotional Health and Safety

Adult and Student Well-Being and Emotional Competence

Belonging, Connection, and Support

Academic Challenge and Engagement

Relationships are Essential to Positive Conditions for Learning

Adopt A Multi-tiered Response

Tier 3
Intensive
Intervention

Tier 2
Early Intervention

Tier 1
Universal Prevention

Foundational Supports
Which Promote Positive Conditions for Learning

Expanded Learning

Community Schools

https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/

Attendance Works ©

Tiered Solutions Must Address the Reasons Students Are Missing Too Much School

Barriers
- Chronic and acute illness
- Family responsibilities or home situation
- Trauma
- Poor transportation
- Housing and food insecurity
- Lack of access to needed services (including health)
- System involvement
- Lack of access to technology
- Community violence

Aversion
- Struggling academically and/or behaviorally
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Social and peer challenges
- Anxiety
- Biased disciplinary and suspension practices
- Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations
- Caregivers had negative educational experiences

Disengagement
- Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction
- Bored
- No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)
- Lack of enrichment opportunities
- Lack of academic and behavioral support
- Failure to earn credits
- Need to work conflicts with being in high school

Misconceptions
- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences
- Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness
- Attendance only matters in the older grades
- Suspensions don't count as absence

Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence   Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism: A Toolkit for Action

Woven together into a systemic, tiered approach informed by data / student success systems.

Family Engagement

Student Connectedness

Health & Safety

Community Partnerships

Attendance Works

EVERYONE GRADUATES CENTER

Key Ingredients of Systemic Change to Reducing Absenteeism
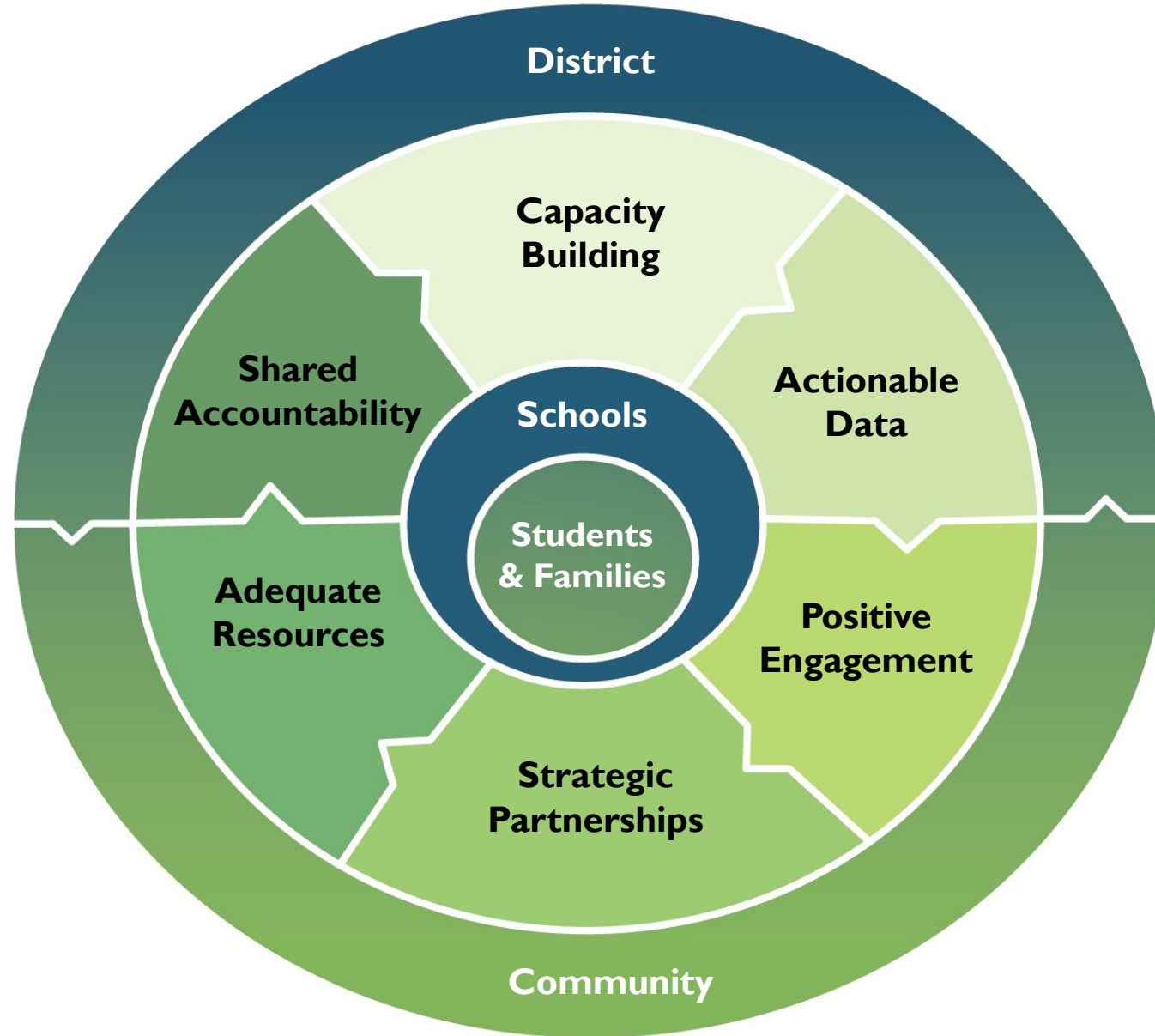
James Bridgeforth

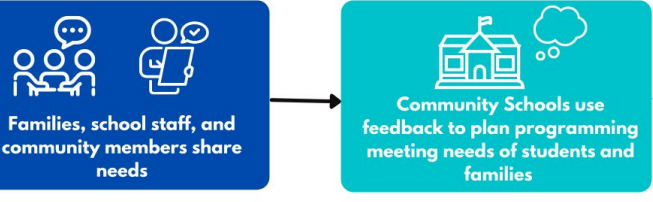Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX)

Pillars, Standards & Frameworks – Oh My!

A Shared Definition

A community school strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development.

As partners, they organize in-and-out of school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive.

Community Schools Forward, 2023
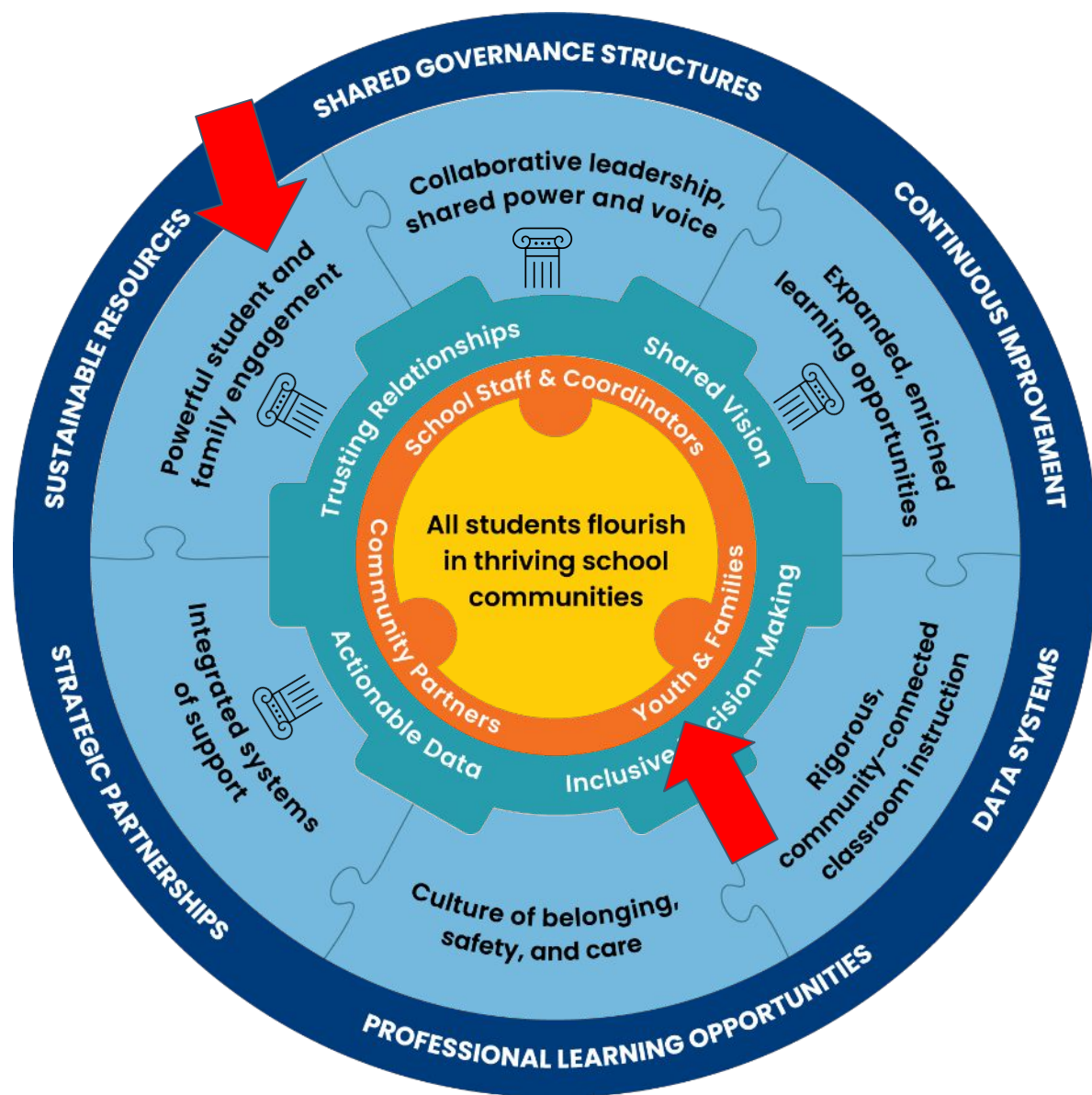
BROOKINGS

National Center for **Community Schools**

COALITION FOR **COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE

https://tinyurl.com/CSFessentialsframework

A Shared Framework

LEGEND

- Why we do this work
- Who drives this work
- Enabling conditions
- Key practices
- Supportive infrastructure

Why Student Voice in Policy and Decision-Making?

"What would happen if we treated the **student** as **someone whose opinion mattered** in *how* learning occurred and **for what *purpose***?"

-Fullan, 2015, p. 174

Typical Approaches to Student Voice in Schools

- Students are seen as **passive actors**, not active collaborators.

- Student involvement is **limited to event planning and fundraising** (e.g., proms, bake sales) instead of curriculum, school climate, policymaking, or funding decisions.

Perceived Barriers to Student Voice in Schools

- *"There's **just not enough time** in the day."*

- *"We **have to focus on academics**, not <u>extra</u> things like student voice."*

- *"Our **students are too young and immature** to be involved in those decisions."*

- *"We **already have a spot** for students on our school site council. Isn't that enough?"*

(Bertrand et al., 2020; Biddle & Hufnagel, 2019; Conner et al., 2023; Leher-Small, 2019; Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mitra, 2018; Pierrottet, 2022)

Why Student Voice in Policy and Decision-Making?

- Ground decision-making practices in the experiences of **those most directly impacted by our decisions – students!**

- Students are able to solve real-world educational problems through shared decision-making that helps them **develop and apply critical thinking skills.**

- Student voice practices can **positively impact school climate and culture through strengthened relationships** amongst students *and* between students and the adults in the building as a result of shared experiences.

(Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011; Levin, 2011; Voight, 2014)

tinyurl.com/ CFJStudent Voice

← STUDENTS AS BYSTANDERS — STUDENT GOVERNANCE →

Stance Towards Youth	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Lead Together
Impact	Reproduce Inequities	Tokenization	Voice	Delegated Power	(Shared) Ownership
Goal	Provide youth with relevant information.	Gather input from youth.	Ensure youth needs and priorities are part of the process & solution.	Ensure youth capacity to play a leadership role in design and implementation of decisions.	Democratic participation and equity through shared leadership, & decision-making.
Message	"We will keep you informed."	"We care what you think."	"You are making us think (and therefore act) differently about the issue.."	"Youth leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue."	"We cannot unlock transformative solutions without you."
Racial Equity **BIYOC** = Black, indigenous, youth of color **Underrepresented, intersectional** = youth of color that also identify as immigrant, multi-lingual, Queer and Transgender, foster care, systems-impacted, unhoused, or as youth with disabilities	Communication materials are distributed widespread without targeted outreach to BIYOC.	Multiple rounds of widespread BIYOC engagement events and activities are conducted through a variety of methods (such as surveys, focus groups, and town halls).	Targeted engagement of BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth engage in events to share their unique needs and priorities.	BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth co-lead with adults to engage other BIYOC and stakeholders in the decision-making process and have some decision-making power. Training and support is provided for youth to participate meaningfully.	BIYOC and underrepresented, intersectional youth have significant or full leadership and decision-making power. They collaborate with adults as equals. Training, supports and financial resources are provided for youth to lead meaningfully.
Activities	Online information postings, fact sheets, presentations, open houses	Focus Groups/Surveys, Community Forums, Public Comment	Youth Advisory Committees, Students on Hiring Committees	Youth on school wide decision making committees or as members on boards or school site councils, youth task force, partnering with a community organization to engage and support youth	Participatory Budgeting, youth-led funding decisions, youth-led initiatives or campaigns, partnering with a community organization to have youth lead

Adapted from:
Youth Voice adaptation of "Spectrum of Community Engagement" by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, in collaboration with Movement Strategy Center and the Building Healthy Communities Initiative.
Toshalis, Eric & Michael Nakkula. 2012. Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice: The Students at the Center Series.
Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. http://www.studentsatthecenterhub.org/resource/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice.

Californians for Justice

Moving from *Typical* to *Transformational*

Student Voice Continuum
STUDENT POWER

Californians for Justice

STUDENTS AS BYSTANDERS ← → STUDENT GOVERNANCE

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What Does Student Voice Have to do with Chronic Absence?

Is Responsiveness to Student Voice Related to Academic Outcomes? Strengthening the Rationale for Student Voice in School Reform

JOSEPH KAHNE and BENJAMIN BOWYER
University of California, Riverside

JESSICA MARSHALL
Northwestern University

ERICA HODGIN
University of California, Riverside

In a study including 86 schools in a large and diverse district, Kahne et al. (2022) observed:

- "a consistent, positive relationship between a school's **responsiveness to student voice** and **students' grades and attendance.**"

- "**Responsiveness to student voice**, whether measured at the student level or school level, **was related** to **higher GPAs**, **fewer absences**, and **less chronic absenteeism**."

A Shared Framework
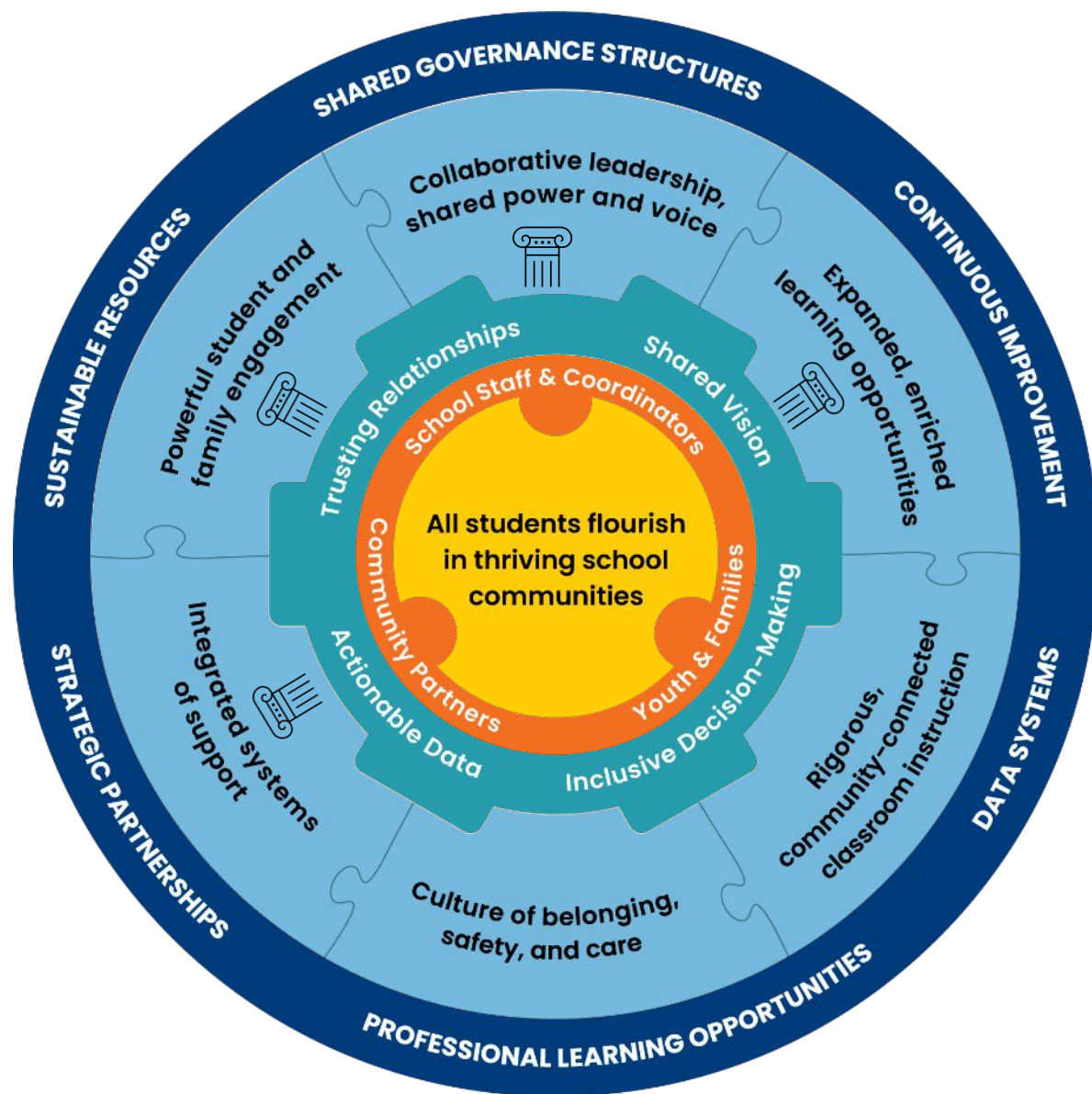
LEGEND

- Why we do this work
- Who drives this work
- Enabling conditions
- Key practices
- Supportive infrastructure

Jessica Gunderson

Co-CEO, Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY)

By strategically linking practice and policy, we make sure that children and youth in the most under-resourced communities receive **quality expanded learning opportunities** and that all their learning environments—school, afterschool, and summer—support their academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being.

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

Stronger partnerships between schools and expanded learning improves student connectedness and engagement

"You almost can't see the line between the school district and afterschool because one can't succeed without the other."

—Ernesto Villanueva
Principal, Rice Elementary School

"The benefits of community-based and school-based partnerships are endless. We get to do what we do best, which is invest in young people, build caring relationships, and give them opportunities to learn and play and grow. It gives our kids the sense that there are more people rooting for them."

—Michelle Edwards Heery
Executive Vice President,
Boys & Girls Clubs of Sonoma-Marin

PARTNERSHIP FOR
CHILDREN & YOUTH

Expanded learning is *uniquely positioned* to increase student connectedness and engagement

Research shows that **participation in afterschool and summer programs improves:**

School-day attendance

Sense of belonging + school connectedness

Meaningful + participatory learning

Alignment between research-based quality standards and school engagement:

Safe + supportive environment

Active + engaged learning

Skill building

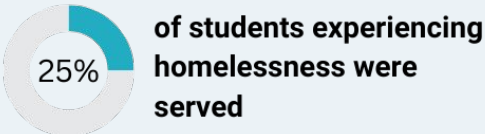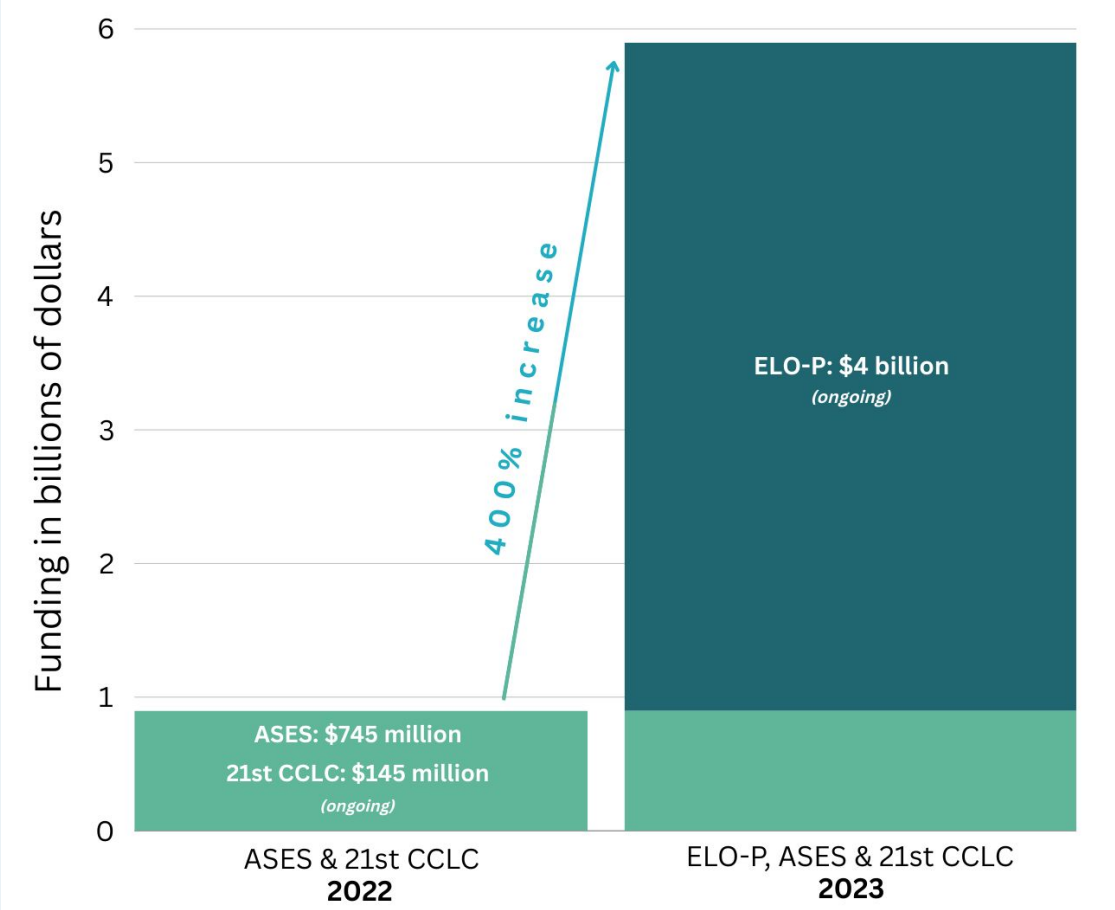**Youth voice + leadership**

Diversity, access, + equity

Healthy choices + behaviors

Coherence matters to student success:

authentic collaboration is necessary to maximize the value of additional learning time.

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

ELO-P funding is flexible and ongoing

1. Very flexible and ongoing - supports local needs and creative solutions

2. Allocated at district level and meant to be a universal program: can implement system-level strategies

3. Built on existing infrastructure, partnerships, and staff relationships

4. Prioritizes students & schools experiencing the highest levels of chronic absence

Funding in billions of dollars

400% increase

ELO-P: $4 billion *(ongoing)*

ASES: $745 million
21st CCLC: $145 million *(ongoing)*

ASES & 21st CCLC **2022**

ELO-P, ASES & 21st CCLC **2023**

90% **children of color**

84% **disadvantaged socioeconomically**

33% **English Language Learners**

25% **of students experiencing homelessness were served**

(Students and families served by publicly funded expanded learning prior to ELO-P)

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH
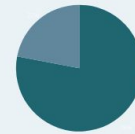
What expanded learning offers

A diverse workforce rooted in their communities

70% are people of color

90% are bilingual in English and Spanish [2]

78% live in the community they serve

Positive staff-child relationships are the foundation of expanded learning programs and improve student learning and social development

Staff work in **partnership** with families, teachers, and administrators

Publicly funded expanded learning programs employ **30,000+ professionals** statewide

Majority are pursuing careers in teaching, afterschool leadership, education administration or school counseling
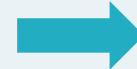
Community partners

Community resources

Longstanding relationships

Larger table

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

Strategies that increased student engagement during/after pandemic:

- **More flexible roles and schedule:** afterschool workers could deliver meals, provide tech support to families

- **Targeted recruitment and outreach:** schools and CBOs recruited students as a team using attendance as a key factor *(phone calls, home visits from bilingual staff)*

- **Small group tutoring/learning groups:** smaller ratios supported more planning time for teachers or extra attention for targeted groups

- **Fun in learning and student choice:** provided relevant and interesting enrichment based on surveys of kids and families; field trips

- **Wellness (for students & staff) during afterschool hours**, including therapy, mindfulness, social workers

"
"Coming from the pandemic and quarantine, I was really looking for a sense of community. And I found that in the afterschool program."

—Ailyn, age 17
Alliance Collins Family College Ready High School, Los Angeles

"
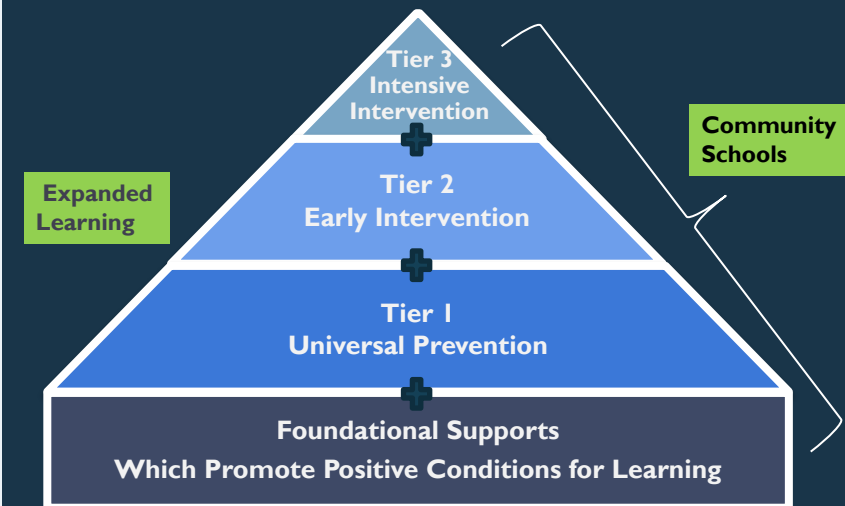**"Our priorities and program objectives were focused on getting the students to regain confidence and skills that maybe they missed as a result of COVID...We targeted our most vulnerable students first, by asking 'What are your interests? What are your skills? And let's build from that.'"**

—Kathy Serrano
Santa Barbara Unified School District

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CHILDREN & YOUTH

Actions for districts/schools & students/families

- **Build awareness and engagement with families:** schools are now open in some cases 7am-6pm and offer 3 meals/day

- **Conduct targeted outreach to families:** work with expanded learning to use data to target disengaged students and families via phone calls and home visits with multilingual staff

- **Integrate teams:** Site coordinators should be an integral part of CARE and attendance teams

- **Increase awareness building and training** for expanded learning staff on the importance and impact of chronic absence, especially when they are interacting with families regularly

- **Offer summer bridge programs for transitions:** TK to Kindergarten and into middle or high schools

- **Motivate participation:** implement responsive and fun programing

Expanded learning is part of the *multi-tiered* *approach to* *address barriers*

Expanded Learning

Community Schools

Tier 3
Intensive Intervention

Tier 2
Early Intervention

Tier 1
Universal Prevention

Foundational Supports
Which Promote Positive Conditions for Learning

*https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/
addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/*

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Actions for state leaders

- **Data collection and data sharing:**

  - State-level data on ELO-P needs to be collected

  - Expanded learning needs to be integrated into student information systems

- State could **prioritize slots** for chronically absent students

- Increase state **technical assistance** for both school day and expanded learning to better develop a coordinated response

PARTNERSHIP FOR
CHILDREN & YOUTH

Table talk prompts

- What questions or observations came up for you?
- What are ideas or action items you can take back to your organization?
- What statewide policies, structures, or supports are needed at this time?

Panelist Q&A