LCAP Baseline Data on School Climate and Pupil Engagement

In 2013-14, California began implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which required every school district in California to develop, with community input, a three-year Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) to use as a roadmap for spending decisions and progress monitoring. The LCAP must identify annual goals, specific actions, and measure progress across eight areas identified as state priorities. The 2013-15 Biennial Statewide California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) provides important baseline data for understanding the overall status of California secondary students and schools at the dawn of the LCAP era for gauging progress. This factsheet provides the results for two of these priorities: school climate and pupil engagement. [1]

For school climate, two of the metrics specified in the LCAP regulations are school connectedness and perceived school safety, both of which are measured by the CHKS.[2] For pupil engagement, the metrics are attendance, chronic absenteeism, and dropout and graduation rates. The CHKS augments these indicators with a wide range of other data on school climate and pupil engagement, including factors that may influence these priorities. This factsheet summarizes the results for school connectedness, perceived safety, four indicators of pupil engagement, and related student supports among 7th, 9th, and 11th graders.

Results

The results from the 2013-15 Biennial Statewide CHKS reinforce the importance of paying attention to these state LCAP priorities, revealing considerable room for improvement, particularly among high school students. Only one-sixth to one-fifth of secondary students felt very safe in school and indicators of connectedness, engagement, and attendance declined as grade levels increased. Almost half of 7th graders and six-in-ten high school students were not highly connected to their schools. About one-tenth of 11th graders appear highly disengaged. Moreover, only about three-in-ten high school students experienced high levels of the types of supports from adults at school that have been found to foster connectedness, engagement, and other positive school outcomes.

School Climate

School Connectedness. Research has documented that school connectedness is associated with multiple positive academic, social-emotional, and health outcomes — including pupil engagement. The CHKS measures school connectedness using a psychometrically robust, validated five-item scale derived from the prominent National Adolescent Health Survey. Students are categorized as high, moderate, or low in school connectedness based on this scale.[3]

- Only half of 7th graders, and four-in-ten high school students, were highly connected to their schools (44% in 9th grade and 43% in 11th).

- About one-tenth in all three grades were low in connectedness.

School Safety. School safety affects connectedness and learning. The survey contains two questions that assess perceived safety that produced similar results. Perceived safety is often lowest in 9th grade, although most victimization indicators decline across ascending grades. This reflects the psychological aspects of feeling safe.

- About six-in-ten secondary students reported they felt safe or very safe at school. Only one-fifth of 7th and 11th graders, and one-sixth of 9th graders, felt very safe.

- Similarly, about six-in-ten secondary students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel safe in my school," that is part of the school connectedness scale. Strong agreement was only at 24% in 7th grade, and then dropped to 16% and 18% in 9th and 11th, respectively. Moreover, 14% of 7th graders, dropping to 11% of 11th graders, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt safe.

One reason for youth not feeling safe, or connected to the school, is the prevalence of bullying, harassment, and other forms of victimization. CHKS data has shown that victims of harassment report lower perceived school safety and connectedness, as well as poorer mental health.[4]

- Reports of being harassed or bullied at school in the past 12 months were at 40% in 7th grade, 38% in 9th, and 31% in 11th.

- About three-quarters of these experiences (30%, 29%, and 24%) were due to one of five reasons related to bias.

Pupil Engagement

School connectedness both reflects and contributes to pupil learning engagement. In addition, the CHKS sheds light on pupil engagement by asking students about their academic motivation, truancy (attendance), missing school because of lack of interest or boredom, and substance use at school. Consistent with the finding that one-tenth of 11th graders were low in school connectedness, about one-tenth reported regular truancy, being absent from school because it was boring, and substance use on school property.

Academic Motivation. Percentages of students classified as high in academic motivation (based on a new four-item scale) are even lower than for connectedness and also declined progressively across grades, from 38% in 7th grade to 25% in 11th.

Truancy. As connectedness and academic motivation decline, truancy increases. During the past 12 months, 4% of 7th graders, 8% of 9th and 12% of 11th had skipped school (without permission) or cut classes once a month or more often. Moreover, 5% of 9th graders and 8% of 11th graders were chronic truants who skipped at least once a week.

Boredom. Being absent from school at least once in the past 30 days because of lack of interest or because it was boring occurred among 3% of 7th graders, 5% of 9th, and 10% of 11th. Among high school students, this was the fifth most frequently selected reason for being absent out of eleven options, behind sickness, emotional distress, lack of sleep, and being behind in school work or unprepared.

Substance Use at School. Use of alcohol or other drugs (AODs) on school property is an indicator of both heavy substance use and disengagement from school. AOD use on school property in the past 30 days was reported by 7% of 11th graders and 10% had been drunk/high three or more times in their lifetime (and 18% at least once).

Student Supports

Another school climate factor measured by the CHKS that research has shown influences school connectedness, safety, and engagement is the degree to which adults in schools (or families or communities) provide students with three developmental supports—caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. These can be viewed as equivalents to the long-standing call for Relationships, Rigor, and Relevance. Students who experience high levels of these three supports at school are more likely to report more positive educational, social-emotional, and health outcomes, including greater school connectedness, attendance, and grades.

- Around one-third of 7th and 11th graders, and one-quarter of 9th graders, were classified as high in total student supports (the results for all three scales combined). About one-fifth of high school students were low in total supports, compared to 14% in 7th grade.

- The results for being high in caring adult relation-ships are similar, at 33%, 27%, 34% by ascending grade.

- Only 13%-16% of students across grades were categorized as high in meaningful participation, whereas 31%-38% were low. This is the smallest variation in results across grades of all three supports, perhaps because that is the least provided.

Discussion

These results provide an overall picture of California's secondary students and schools at the dawn of the LCAP era and confirm the wisdom of the state in identifying improving school climate (especially connectedness and safety) and pupil engagement as key LCAP priorities. Perhaps the most disconcerting finding is that around one-tenth of 11th graders appear to be seriously disengaged. That is the proportion of seniors who reported being low in school connectedness, chronic truancy, missing school because they were bored/disinterested, and regularly engaging in AOD use on school property. This is likely a conservative estimate, as disengaged students are probably under-represented in the CHKS sample because they weren't attending school the day of the survey or had already dropped out.

Research also suggests that fostering more positive adult relationships with students, high expectations, and meaningful student participation, will help increase connectedness, a sense of safety, and engagement. Focusing on providing these student supports may be particularly important in high-poverty, high-risk, under-resourced communities, as they are protective factors that mitigate the risk factors that undermine students' readiness to learn.

Through future Biennial surveys, we will monitor how well the state's schools do in improving these state priorities.[5] Districts need to pay greater attention to these indicators if we hope to see progress. An analysis of the LCAPs for the 50 largest districts in the state revealed that only 36% had goals related to both safety and connectedness and only one district had two years of comparable data from school climate surveys to enable

annual progress assessment.[6]

Moreover, most of these large districts failed to include disaggregated goals by subgroup and few districts request disaggregated CHKS results. LCAP requirements include addressing variations in achievement and state priorities among "numerically significant" subgroups of students. The CHKS enables assessment of results among specific groups listed in the requirements (ethnicity, English learners, foster youth, socioeconomically disadvantaged), as well as by gender, sexual orientation, living arrangement (e.g., family composition, homeless), and migrant status. Analyzing CHKS findings by these subgroups can help target interventions at those most in need and contribute to a greater understanding of the factors that may affect group differences in achievement, connectedness, safety, pupil engagement, and other CHKS indicators.

Districts need to look beyond just collecting and reporting the metrics specified in the LCAP regulations to a broader assessment of, and focus on, school climate and pupil engagement. Understanding how they are related, how they vary across subgroups, and the factors that influence them is key to school districts determining how to address their LCAP priorities and meet their goals. Although the data are correlational (not causal), CHKS findings can provide context and insight into why students may not feel connected, safe, and engaged.[7]

To learn more about how to use Cal-SCHLS to support LCAP efforts, download *Helpful Resources for Local Control and Accountability Plans* (chks.wested.org/resources/LCAP_Cal_SCHLS.pdf).

Also useful is the guidebook, *Making Sense of School Climate* (californias3.wested.org/tools/schoolclimate).

Method

The 2013-2015 Biennial State California Healthy Kids-Survey (CHKS) was administered between fall 2013 and spring 2015 to a randomly-selected, representative state sample of 36,573 secondary students (grades 7, 9, and 11) in 105 schools across the state. The survey was conducted under conditions of strict anonymity and con-

fidentiality. Participation by school districts, schools, and students was voluntary and parental consent was required.[8]

Endnotes

[1] For all the survey results, see Austin, G., Polik, J., & Hanson, T. (2016). School climate, substance use, and student well-being in California, 2013-2015. Results of the fifteenth Biennial Statewide Student Survey, Grades 7, 9, and 11. San Francisco: WestEd Health & Human Development Program. Download at chks.wested.org/resources/Biennial_State_1315.pdf

[2] The legislation also requires measuring these factors among school staff and parents, which can be done through the CHKS companion staff and parents surveys. Together, these three surveys comprise California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) system. The LCAP also requires monitoring school climate through suspension and expulsion rates.

[3] Factsheet #5 of the California Safe and Supportive Schools Project summarizes a recent analysis showing that the level of connectedness among California students, as measured by this scale, is positively associated with API scores and differentiates between high- and low-performing schools (download at Californias3.wested.org/tools/research).

[4] Austin, G., Nakamoto, J., & Bailey, J. (2010). Harassment among California students, 2006-08. CHKS Factsheet #10. San Francisco: WestEd. Download chks.wested.org/using-results/factsheets

[5] The Core Module now also contains indicators for two other LCAP state priorities: parental involvement and school facilities. Statewide results for these indicators will be available in the 2015-17 Biennial Report.

[6] Lee, B. Klein, M., & Christeson, W. (2016). Improving School Climate through LCAPs: Analysis of the School Climate Priority in Year 2 Annual Updates of Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) for California's 50 Largest School Districts. San Francisco, CA: Fight Crime Invest in Kids California.

[7] The data in this Biennial Report are drawn only from the CHKS Core Module. To further guide LCAP efforts, districts may elect to add to their local survey the additional School Climate Module that provides further data on school academic supports, discipline and order; supports for social and emotional learning; bullying prevention and positive peer relationships; respect for diversity; and the quality of the physical environment.

[8] Since 2011-2013, the biennial state survey sample selection and data collection have been embedded within the process of local CHKS administration by school districts under the sponsorship of the California Department of Education. This method was adopted to replace the previous separate biennial California Student Survey that began in 1985 in order to reduce the survey burden on schools, ensure representative state data for the CHKS, and foster continued local CHKS administration. The California Department of Health Care Services provided financial support of the statewide survey. The state's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, approved the protocol.

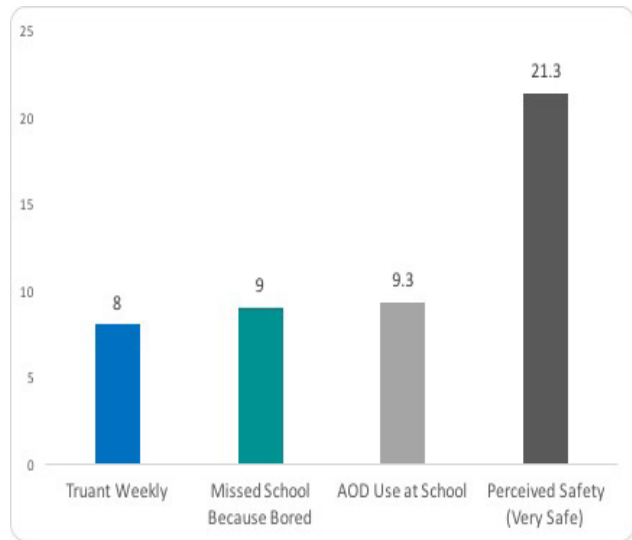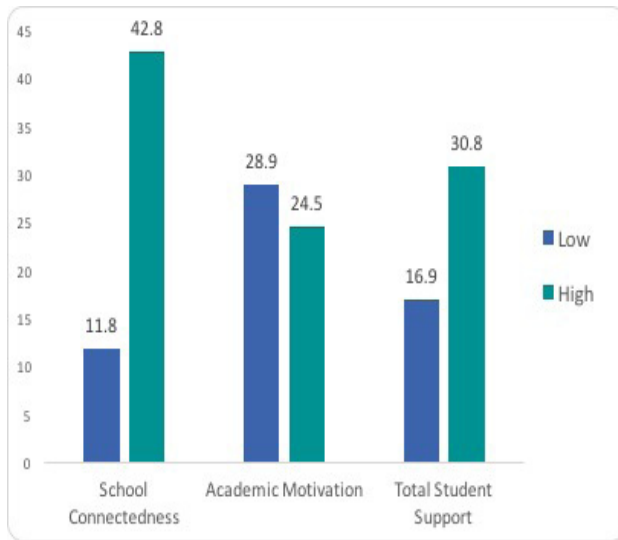## Charts 1 & 2. Summary of Key LCAP-Related CHKS Results, 11th Grade

Table 1. Summary of Key LCAP-Related Indicators, 7th-11th Grade

	2013-15		
School Climate	7th (%)	9th (%)	11th (%)
School connectedness (high)	51.1	44.2	42.8
Feel very safe	19.7	16.0	21.3
Experienced any harassment/bullying†	39.5	37.6	30.5
Bias-related harassment	29.7	28.6	24.3
Afraid of being beaten up†	19.9	15.4	10.5
Pupil Engagement			
Academic motivation (high)	37.8	27.1	24.5
Truant once/month or more†	3.5	6.8	12.4
Missed school because bored/uninterested in it*	2.6	5.3	9.8
Current AOD use on school property*	4.9	8.5	9.3
Been drunk or "high" on drugs at school, ever	3.8	10.5	17.9
3 or more times	1.6	5.5	10.2
Student Developmental Support at School (High)			
Total support	32.8	26.0	30.8
Caring relationships	32.7	27.0	33.9
High expectations	52.6	41.3	43.8
Meaningful participation	14.5	12.2	14.5

Notes: †Past 12 months; *Past 30 days.
Methods for classifying students as high on an indicator are explained in the full Biennial CHKS Report (see Endnote #1).