

## Attendance Commission

Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2017

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center  
100 West Randolph Street  
Fourteenth Floor, V-Tel Room  
Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building  
100 North First Street  
Third Floor, V-Tel Room  
Springfield, Illinois 62777

### I. Roll Call

#### Present

Jeff Aranowski – telephone  
Stephanie Bernoteit – Chicago  
Lori Fanello - telephone  
Karen Fox – telephone  
Heidi Grove - telephone  
Victoria Jackson – Springfield by proxy  
(Jean Becker)  
Madelyn James - telephone  
Shenita Johnson – Chicago  
Ryan Mann – telephone via proxy  
(Alex Mays)  
Joseph McMahon - telephone  
Melissa Mitchell – telephone  
Matthew Rodriguez – Chicago by proxy  
(Vanesa Richardson)  
Diane Rutledge - Springfield  
Deanna Sullivan - Springfield  
Harold Sweeney – Chicago  
Antoinette Taylor – Chicago  
Scott Wakeley – telephone  
Crysta Weitekamp - telephone

#### Not Present

Karen Hunter Anderson  
Christina Campos  
Tiffany Gholson  
Jennifer Gill  
Diane Grigsby-Jackson  
Beth Malik  
Kevin Westall

### II. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The meeting began at 10:05 a.m.

### III. Approval of Minutes from the December 15, 2016 Meeting

Deanna Sullivan moved to approve the minutes, and Stephanie Bernoteit seconded her motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

### IV. Illinois Attendance Commission Outcome Three

Ms. Taylor said that at the time the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force issued its final report in July 2014, there had been some questions raised within the task force about Truants' Alternative and Optional Educational Programs (TAOEP) funding since the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) receives 26.8 percent of TAOEP funding as part of its block grant. In FY 2013, CPS served 1,915 students with \$3,082,000 (\$1,609/student).

Harold Sweeney, Director of At-Risk Student Services/Truancy for the Boone/Winnebago Regional Office of Education, provided an overview of TAOEP's funding, programming, and results. TAOEP serves four different categories of students:

1. Truant students – absent without valid cause for less than five percent of school days
2. Chronic or habitual truant – absent without valid cause for five percent or more of school days
3. Retrieved dropout – a student who has left school and then returned
4. Potential dropout – student at risk for becoming a dropout

He said every TAOEP program looks different because all grantees design programs to suit the needs of young people in their specific areas. He said this is a problem when you talk with legislators. Some programs are truancy intervention only while others are interventions with alternative options. Some involve close work with school districts to retrieve dropouts or discourage those considering dropping out. Data reports for TAOEP programs all look different, and you cannot make an apple-to-apple comparison.

He provided the members of the commission with samples of the paperwork from the TAOEP program he runs in Boone and Winnebago Counties including the referral papers that cite the factors behind a student's truancy or dropout status. He explained further that in Rockford, many dropouts return to school because the Rockford Housing Authority will remove families from public or subsidized housing if a family's school-age children are not enrolled in school.

The TAOEP paperwork additionally showed the number of academic options available to the at-risk students that range from academic instruction to credit recovery programs. There are a number of non-academic options available to students as well, from court-related and day care services to counseling, medical care, and transportation, among others. Finally, student paperwork is completed to reflect program outcomes such as graduation, promotion to next grade level, or a GED certification. Other outcomes included a range of events that spanned returning to regular school programming to dropping out of TAOEP-sponsored programming altogether.

Mr. Sweeney shared a chart that depicted TAOEP enrollments by location which reflected a drastic reduction in the number of students served by the Chicago Public Schools in TAOEP programming, from almost 85,000 in 2011 to 565 the following year to 2,417 in 2014. The non-CPS TAOEP programs throughout the state did not reflect such a dramatic decrease in the number of students served despite funding reductions, from 24,839 in 2010 to 19,718 in 2014. Using the 2014 numbers, CPS was spending \$1,275 per student while downstate districts were spending \$520 a student.

Madelyn James asked if there was any way to determine how much of the costs were related to salaries, and Mr. Sweeney said there was no way to determine that with the reports ISBE puts out. He said most program costs are payroll-related although in some areas, and some TAOEP program managers may need to rent space and pay office overhead costs.

Mr. Sweeney showed an additional page which shows the funding history of TAOEP which reflected a 36.4 percent decrease in funding over a five year span, from 2010 to 2014. He said those involved in TAOEP programs are getting by and doing the best they can with reduced funding.

Finally, the data reports included the numbers of program participants by attendance category and a table which enumerated the success rates of participating school districts by listing the percentages of increased and decreased attendance rates. In Mr. Sweeney's program, 87 percent of the TAOEP program participants had improved their rates of attendance. Within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), however, only 22.1 percent of TAOEP students improved their rate of school attendance as 73.4 percent actually attended school less after enrolling in the CPS TAOEP programming.

Ms. Taylor stressed the importance of keeping current with TAOEP as it could potentially be part of a commission recommendation under outcome #3 as the program is very successful in most areas and is very useful in addressing attendance issues for students who are the most at-risk for failure.

There was some discussion about the fact that CPS automatically receives 26.8 percent of TAOEP funding under the block grant while other districts, community colleges, and ROEs across the state engage in a highly competitive process for the remaining funds. These other contractors want a more equitable distribution of all the TAOEP funding because CPS spends more per child and achieves far less than other contractors. Ms. Taylor said the block grant funding mechanism for CPS is being reviewed by the funding reform commission.

Deanna Sullivan thought the commission should explore a working group or a subcommittee as there are so many issues to discuss. The Attendance Commission should have some input into truancy programs sanctioned by the state. Ms. Taylor concurred and called for more discussion at the next meeting.

Vanessa Richardson (proxy for Matthew Rodriguez) asked whether or not TAOEP involves parents. Mr. Sweeney said the parent piece is large. He said you cannot do effective truancy work without making a home visit. Each case is different: mental illness, substance abuse, lack of supervision, transportation difficulties, bullying, etc.

Ms. James wondered if the commission should look at other states for additional guidance. Jeff Aranowski reminded the commission that most states have enacted legislation around truancy, so a legislative analysis might be an informative endeavor.

Mr. Sweeney said there had been talk about awarding TAOEP funding on a non-competitive basis so TAOEP providers are assured continued funding for their programs.

Ms. Taylor referenced *The Hamilton Project: Lessons for Broadening School Accountability Under the Every Student Succeeds Act* which reports chronic absence data in alignment with the standard utilized by the Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education which is 15 or more missed school days.

In Illinois, 12.7 percent of public school students are chronically absent, according to this measure. Only 12.5 percent of Illinois schools have no one who is chronically absent. Statistics also reveal an upward tick in student absence as students age:

- 8.4 percent of elementary students are chronically absent in Illinois
- 11.7 percent of middle school students are chronically absent in Illinois
- 20.7 percent of high school students are chronically absent in Illinois

Mr. Sweeney reminded Ms. Taylor that two grades in high school are above the mandatory school attendance age, so no intervention can be attempted with a student who is 17 years old or older.


Ms. Taylor said it would be interesting to find out which schools are among the 12.5 percent of schools with no chronically absent students. Ms. James said some schools may not have reported chronic absences numbers because they are so small, they did not want to share data for students who would then be known to the community. This is self-reported data. Mr. Aranowski added that what is also important to note is that Illinois has not enacted a definition of chronic absence, so that affects data collection.

Ms. Sullivan explained she thought the Hamilton Project document contained important information and appreciated its look at that indicator (chronic absenteeism) as an element of accountability and its validity. She said the Project's case for utilizing chronic absenteeism as an ESSA indicator was very compelling.

Ms. Taylor echoed her sentiments and said a student's constant presence at school will positively impact his/her opportunities for learning.

Ms. Taylor said she and Sara Boucek of the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure (IBAM) Committee have been collaborating as both bodies have some parallel responsibilities, and they wish to avoid working apart from one another toward common ends. This collaboration ensures a coordination of efforts toward the determination of recommendations for the General Assembly.

*Outcome #3 for the Attendance Commission which was created within ISBE  
Mechanisms for reporting and accountability for schools and districts across this state, including creating multiple measure indexes for reporting*

[PA 99-0193](#)  created the IBAM Committee within ISBE  
*The purpose of the Committee is to develop recognition standards for student performance and school improvement for all school districts and their individual schools. The standards developed will be an outcomes-based, balanced accountability measure.*

Sara Boucek was present by phone and said the work of her committee shifted once ESSA was passed. She added that the Attendance Commission, IBAM Committee, and the P-20 Council must concur on the accountability factors build into the state's implementation of ESSA. She was happy to report that these bodies agreed that chronic absence should be an indicator for grades K-12 and have recommended, in conjunction with the Attendance Commission, that chronic absence be defined as missing 10 percent of school days, for any reason, during the prior academic year. This standard would be easier for district reporting and for consistency among all school districts across the state. IBAM's recommendation to the State Board for the definition of chronic absence includes exceptions for students who are medically certified for home or hospital study and students who have experienced a death in the family. The latter exception is one that Ms. Boucek knows may not have the full agreement of everyone on the Attendance Commission, but it is a concept that has its supporters particularly for children who lose a parent or a caregiver. Ms. Taylor said the exception for the death of a family member may not have legislative support.

Ms. Bernoteit asked if the exceptions for medically-compromised children and those who have experienced the death of a loved one would just be implemented for the accountability measure or if it would be extended to the official tracking and recording of attendance at schools and districts.

Ms. Boucek said she does not see school reporting mechanisms going away. She said IBAM was interested in finding a data point for inclusion in the accountability plan. She said all the research shows that chronic absence is truly behind the lack of success among students. She said this definition will enable everyone to provide targeted supports to students who show the greatest need. Getting the kids in the chair behind the desk will drive academic success.

Mr. Sweeney asked if there would be a recommendation for a limit to the number of days a child could be absent for the death of a family member, and Ms. Boucek replied there was not. She did say there had been much discussion among IBAM Committee members over whether a death in the family should even be an exception, what would be encompassed in the definition of what

constitutes a close relative, and how much time would be allowable for such an absence. They felt that it is the job of the General Assembly to define these exceptions. She said she cannot imagine a school ‘dinging’ a student for that type of circumstance.

Mr. Sweeney said what constitutes reasonable time away from school when a student experiences a death in the family varies broadly and some students may miss up to three weeks of school in such a situation. He added that if districts get to decide these matters, the data will be inconsistent. He explained further that death in the immediate family is already a valid reason for absence from school.

Ms. Sullivan brought up the fact that the home- or hospital-bound students are keeping up with their classwork and are being tutored so they should be counted as being in attendance.

## **V. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

## **VI. New Business and Open Discussion**

Ms. Taylor met with Illinois Education Secretary Beth Purvis and Sara Shaw on the average daily attendance measure in relation to school funding on January 3. She also met with the P-20 Council where there was some interest in the Attendance Commission’s annual report and the inclusion of what is fast becoming the national standard for chronic absence, absence from school for any reason in excess of 10 percent of the last 180 school days.

Ms. Taylor said she would like to cancel the commission’s May 25 meeting as the General Assembly will be in full session, and many members will be involved in legislative efforts. Mr. Sweeney suggested the commission wait until March or April to decide.

Ms. Taylor had a letter in her possession from the IASB thanking the Attendance Commission for its participation in a hearing at the Triple I conference.

The Civil Rights Data Collection division sent notice of a project whereby they plan to gather data from over 17,000 school districts in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 3501 et seq.). The Department of Education is proposing a revision of an existing information collection and would like public input. Data elements include enrollment, staffing, and resource pathways to college and career, college and career readiness, discipline, bullying, physical restraint, and seclusion. They have an open comment period that ends February 28. The Attendance Commission will not be making any formal comment to this project. Ms. Taylor said she would supply the link to provide public comment to the commission administrator for distribution to members who may wish to respond as individuals or as representatives from their agencies but not as a member of the Attendance Commission .

College Changes Everything (CCE) is looking to expand their *Attendance is Everything* message at their next conference which is to be held July 20, 2017, in Tinley Park. CCE is looking for interest session proposals at this time and has expressed interest in accommodating the Attendance Commission at the conference. *Equity in Career and College Initiatives – Ensuring Every Child is Equipped for Success* is this year’s theme. Ms. Taylor asked that commission members consider submitting an interest session proposal for the conference.

Ms. James asked about the media advisory and public service announcement prepared by Illinois State Senator Jacqueline Collins around the importance of school attendance. Ms. Taylor explained that HJR0011 was introduced, legislation that encourages the Illinois State Board of Education and each school district in this state to consider the benefits of the attendance awareness campaign, *Every Student Counts, Every Day Matters*.

**VII. Adjournment**

Shenita Johnson's move to adjourn was seconded by Vanessa Richardson and Crysta Weitekamp simultaneously. No members were opposed, and the meeting ended at 11:53 a.m.