

Attendance Commission

Meeting Minutes
February 15, 2019
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.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 - Chicago
Jean Becker – telephone
Stephanie Bernoteit – telephone
(proxy Sophia Gehlhausen Anderson)
Lori Fanello – telephone
Karen Fox - telephone
Jennifer Gill – telephone
Diane Grigsby-Jackson - telephone
(proxy Javon Gregoire)
Shenita Johnson – Chicago
Beth Malik - telephone
Joseph McMahon – telephone
(proxy Jessica Michaels)
Sarah Rothschild - telephone
Deanna Sullivan - Springfield
Harold Sweeney - telephone
Antoinette Taylor – Chicago

Not Present

John Burkey
Christina Campos
Madelyn James
Mackenzie Montgomery
Matthew Rodriguez
Scott Wakeley
Crysta Weitekamp
Kevin Westall
Katherine Yager

II. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 a.m.

III. Approval of Minutes from the January 10, 2019 Meeting

A motion to approve the minutes was advanced by Jeff Aranowski and seconded by Deanna Sullivan. A voice vote confirmed all present members approved.

IV. ESSA 2019 Conference Attendance Sessions Update

Ms. Fanello said that she explained her research project on the best practices employed by statewide administrators in response to the chronic absence of students. Some of those participating in the session also contributed some of their own practices in this regard.

Harold Sweeney explained that he addressed the group about House Bills 190 and 907. HB 190 provides that school boards would be required to ensure schools offer academic supports to at-risk students, while HB 907 would require the Department of Mental Health to provide services for students at risk for mental health problems. Mr. Sweeney thinks students should be able to avail themselves of these services anonymously via school libraries.

Deanna Sullivan was also present at the conference and acknowledged Ms. Taylor's successful keynote delivery as did Lori Fanello who said Ms. Taylor also provided conference attendees with a thorough overview of the Attendance Commission and its work and accomplishments. She explained that Jeff Aranowski spoke about the instructional day and said that the state will probably go back to the five-hour day with concessions around adjusted school day options for children in alternative programming. Ms. Fanello also reported that some people expressed concerns over time missed from school due to family vacations and wondered if these missed school days should be reported differently and if parents could be more intentional about vacations to incorporate learning opportunities for the children. Some barriers to school attendance were raised within the group attending the post-keynote session, and these included the lack of transportation and safe routes to school through unsafe community areas. A question was raised about changing the standard for bus service to include children who live within a reasonable distance from school but in neighborhoods plagued by crime. An issue pertaining to physicians' authorization of school excusals was raised as some feel this service is abused. Ms. Fanello concluded that this exchange of ideas was very interactive and worthwhile.

Ms. Taylor commented on the fact that although the weather in Chicago was challenging the morning of February 12, attendance at the conference was very high.

Ms. Sullivan commented that there so many wonderful presentations at the ESSA Conference and wondered about the availability of some of these presentations for distribution. Ms. Taylor commented that she could certainly check with ISBE on the availability of some of these presentations.

Mr. Aranowski also commented on the success of Ms. Taylor's keynote address and the expansiveness of the material she presented. He added that he had recently delivered comments on exclusionary discipline and disproportionality as ISBE is reviewing data to identify districts with these issues to offer targeted supports.

V. Illinois ESSA Special Population (Documented Disability) Review and Discussion: Jeff Aranowski

This presentation was postponed until the May 17, 2019 meeting.

VI. RDA Federal Initiative, SSIP State Initiative: Students with Disabilities (IEPs): Antoinette Taylor

Results-driven Accountability (RDA) has changed the landscape for outcomes for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) since Illinois wrote its state improvement plan based on RDA with the goal to have students reading at or above grade level by third grade. Ms. Taylor said she will reach out to Jodi Fleck of ISBE for more detailed information about this initiative and will present on this topic at the May 17, 2019 meeting.

VII. Illinois' Board Policy and Administrative Procedure Legislative Review and Discussion (Attendance/Truancy): Jeff Aranowski

Mr. Aranowski referred to the January meeting and the brief discussion that was held with respect to district obligations to have board policies and administrative procedures around chronic absenteeism. He referred to 105 ILCS 5/26-13:

Absenteeism and truancy policies. School districts shall adopt policies, consistent with rules adopted by the State Board of Education, which identify the appropriate supportive

services and available resources which are provided for truants and chronic truants.
(Source: P.A. 84-1420.)

The associated administrative rules which are in response to that statutory requirement are essentially a directive to follow the legislated requirements. The rules do not say what supportive and diagnostic services need to look like; the rules say that given the vague nature of the law, districts have to have something in place regarding diagnostic and supportive services for absenteeism and truancy issues. There is no particular state law that requires administrative procedures for any board policy that is required by law. School boards do, however, have a corresponding set of procedures for board policies. An administrative procedure is simply the method to comply with the requirements of a board policy. Mr. Aranowski said he suspects upwards of 90 percent of school boards in the state subscribe to the press policies of the Illinois Association of School Boards and that organization's board procedures.

Ms. Taylor brought up the board policies of the Chicago Public Schools since that issue was never resolved during the tenure of the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force which terminated in 2014. That task force had examined the CPS policy manual at that time and recommended that it be updated to address chronic absence and truancy issues. Since the implementation of the state's ESSA plan which incorporates chronic absence in a tabulation of student success and school quality and the legislation of a formal definition of chronic absence and the mandate to offer supports for chronically absent students, Ms. Taylor thinks it is important for the Attendance Commission to look at the issue of whether school board policy manuals are aligned with current law and policies. The bill defining chronic absence stipulated that the mandate to count chronic absence and to remedy it applied to every school in the state receiving public funds. Although most school boards in the state follow the guidance of the IASB, there are some that do not and that includes CPS. She said the Attendance Commission would be remiss if it did not recommend a review of the CPS policy manual.

Mr. Aranowski said he recalls a meeting that was held after the release of the final report of the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools in July 2015 to discuss an updated policy manual. Ms. Taylor said she has pursued this issue even to the point of meeting with Janice Jackson when she was chief academic officer and again last fall in her position of CEO.

Mr. Aranowski said he was not comfortable talking about CPS without representation at the meeting and wondered if a conversation between CPS and the Attendance Commission could be initiated with a de facto member of the commission.

Deanna Sullivan recommended that a committee be formed that could involve policy people from the IASB and ISBE to study the issue.

Ms. Taylor concurred and said it would be a proactive measure. She said there would be a follow-up on this matter at the May 17 meeting. Mr. Aranowski asked Ms. Sullivan if he could obtain the IASB's press policy on absenteeism. Ms. Sullivan said they create model policies for districts which then can be modified by districts, charter schools, and alternative schools to fit their individual circumstances. What the IASB produces is not adopted wholesale by schools.

Ms. Taylor said she thinks the Attendance Commission needs to be aware of any local educational agencies that have not followed through on the development of policy in adherence to current law so conversations can begin to ensure compliance.

VIII. Instructional Day Update and 101st General Assembly Update

Mr. Aranowski reminded the members that the Evidence-based Funding Bill sunsetted portions of the School Code that required an instructional day to be five hours in length in August 2017 and was officially repealed in March 2018. ISBE had been fielding questions about what this means in the field, so a memorandum was issued that provided school districts with some flexibility in the absence of a legislated definition of the length of an instructional day. ISBE was preparing to issue another memorandum with an FAQ but first had to determine if the calendar reflected what the current state of the law was, and there were two bills introduced on the first day of the legislative session in January 2019: House Bill 247 introduced by Fred Crespo and Senate Bill 28 introduced by Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant. Both bills would revert the length of the instructional day back to five hours, exactly as it was previously. House Bill 247 is currently up for a second reading, and Senate Bill 28 is moving along a little more quickly.

Provides that for a pupil of legal school age and in kindergarten or any of grades 1 through 12, a day of attendance shall be counted only for sessions of not less than 5 clock hours of school work per day under direct supervision of (i) teachers or (ii) non-teaching personnel or volunteer personnel when engaging in non-teaching duties and supervising in instances specified under the Code; provides for exceptions

There have been some extensive negotiations with stakeholders unrelated to the main portion of the bill, mainly about eLearning time when there are emergency days such as for weather-related reasons. Right now there is an eLearning pilot program for up to three districts in the state to participate, a process which involved an application and approval process through ISBE. Currently there is negotiation to lift that cap and allow any district to engage in eLearning during emergency days outside the application and approval process via ISBE but through a verification process by the superintendent of the regional office of education to ensure basic programming requirements are met such as holding a public hearing about eLearning and assuring all students have access. Mr. Aranowski explained eLearning is a relatively new concept and is meant to only be used in lieu of school attendance on a day when inclement weather forces the cancellation of the regular school day. He explained further that there are also negotiations underway about expanding the competency-based pilot to accommodate more school districts as well in order to offer some non-traditional learning opportunities while still going back to the original five-hour instructional requirement.

Cathy Mannen of the Illinois Federation of Teachers was present at the meeting in Springfield, and she voiced the frustration of teachers who wanted more guidance on the school day issue.

IX. IAC Statutory Outcome #1 - Instructional Day: Best Practices/Definitions Facilitators Harold Sweeney and Lori Fanello

Mr. Sweeney provided a document to meeting attendees that explained how a proposed definition of an instructional day was established by a working group representing the districts of Boone and Winnebago County, represented by Regional Office of Education #4. He said the court judges needed a uniform definition of an instructional day so that the court would be able to enforce mandatory attendance statutes.

He said the work group, which represented approximately 80 percent of the Boone and Winnebago counties schools, wanted a working definition but one that would permit flexibility in offering creative, alternative solutions to students struggling to stay in school. It was

additionally necessary to come up with a base amount of instructional time for truancy intervention purposes.

Mr. Sweeney also said the 300-minute calculation for an instructional day is aligned with the standard set by the Teachers Retirement System for a day of service for teachers. The national school lunch program is also built around a 300-minute school day. To accommodate students in alternative online or community college programming, they formulated the means by which these students would be monitored. He additionally explained that the group considered the situations faced by some students who were counted as absent for missing school on election days because they had volunteered to work at polling places, and others who were counted as absent for completing court-ordered activities.

He said this information was shared with Representative Fred Crespo who introduced legislation to reinsert the concept of a mandatory five-hour school day into the School Code. Senator Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant introduced a similar bill (which has since been amended to include flexible accommodations for alternative learning opportunities), and Mr. Sweeney feels neither bill offers the flexibility of the agreement that was reached in Boone and Winnebago Counties which would dovetail nicely with the truancy programs which operate there.

Ms. Sullivan asked if this information had been shared with district staff or administrative organizations, and Mr. Sweeney said that it had not been shared. Mr. Aranowski asked if this agreement was connected officially to ICEARY (Illinois Coalition for Educating At-Risk Youth), and Mr. Sweeney said there is official alignment between the decision of the work group and that organization. He added that ICEARY may support it but does not endorse the agreement. It is being advanced only to secure more stakeholder input. Mr. Aranowski asked that the Attendance Commission be removed from the document Mr. Sweeney shared at the meeting regarding this agreement as the commission had neither discussed nor endorsed the agreement.

Ms. Taylor commented that during a recent meeting of the commission's Definitions and Best Practices work group, the question was raised about communicating ideas for consideration about legislation focused on reinstating the five-hour school day, and it was agreed that the movement on this issue is quite brisk in the legislature as it is of high importance to many.

Shenita Johnson raised the question of the relationship between a 300-minute school day and student outcomes. She also expressed her concern over the issue of students missing school because of civic activities and being counted as absent rather than being provided with excused absences.

Mr. Aranowski said the School Code is clear about what constitutes an excused absence.

Ms. Sullivan said she had been asked to come to the table when Fred Crespo's HB 247 went to committee since she is an attendance commissioner. She informed them that the Attendance Commission should really be looking at these issues and the issue of the definition of an instructional day should not be fast-tracked without commission input.

Cathy Mannen, a member of the public representing the Illinois Federation of Teachers, said the loss of the minimal standard of what an instructional day, coupled with the information ISBE released to the field which broadly defined the resulting flexibilities, and the confusion that it caused in the field as to what constitutes absence, constitutes a problem. When someone looks

through the chronic absenteeism lens, she explained, one of the public's concerns is that if there is not a standard there, it is going to be something that disproportionately impacts students of color and students living in poverty where potential instances of chronic absenteeism will fall through the cracks.

Ms. Sullivan stated that every administrative group in Illinois education is involved in the discussion of what should constitute a school day with legislators.

Ms. Taylor said it was too early for the Attendance Commission to offer comments or an endorsement at that time as the discussion of instructional school day parameters had barely begun. She did say that anyone on the commission can express their point of view on behalf of the organization or agency they represent but not as a member of the commission.

X. Public Comment

There was no comment from the public.

XI. New Business

Ms. Taylor was on a national attendance call with Attendance Works on February 13, 2019, and learned that the American Academy of Pediatricians had released their report on student absenteeism, *The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health*.

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/2/e20183648>

Ms. Taylor said she will be able to resume her study of early childhood absenteeism now that the Illinois Longitudinal Data System was able to renew its funding.

Ms. Sullivan asked if Ms. Taylor could assemble some Attendance Commission materials for her to distribute to Illinois school boards in order to promote school attendance.

XII. Adjourn

Mr. Aranowski moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Shenita Johnson at 12:00 p.m. No one opposed this action.