

## Attendance Commission

Meeting Minutes  
November 8, 2018  
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 – Springfield  
John Burkey - telephone  
Lori Fanello - telephone  
Karen Fox - Chicago  
Beth Malik – Chicago  
Joseph McMahon – telephone by proxy  
Mackenzie Montgomery - Springfield  
Sarah Rothschild - telephone  
Deanna Sullivan - Springfield  
Harold Sweeney - telephone  
Antoinette Taylor - Chicago

#### **Not Present**

Stephanie Bernoteit  
Christina Campos  
Jennifer Gill  
Diane Grigsby-Jackson  
Madelyn James  
Shenita Johnson  
Matthew Rodriguez  
Scott Wakeley  
Crysta Weitekamp  
Kevin Westall  
Katherine Yager

### II. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. by chairperson Antoinette Taylor.

### III. Approval of Minutes from the September Meeting

Karen Fox motioned to approve the minutes from the September 6 meeting, and her motion was seconded by Beth Malik. The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

### IV. Teacher Attendance/Absence and Student Attendance/Absence Correlation: Illinois Federation of Teachers - Legislative Director Cynthia Riseman

Ms. Taylor and Sarah Rothschild are collaborating on an effort to compare teacher absence/vacancy/shortage rates to student absence and are working with ISBE on data retrieval. Ms. Taylor brought this information to the attention of the P-20 Council in September. John Rico of the P-20 Council and commission member Stephanie Bernoteit indicated they wanted to follow up on this study. Ms. Bernoteit facilitated the connection between Ms. Taylor and the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), and the invitation was extended to the IFT's Legislative Director Cynthia Riseman to speak to the commission. Ms. Riseman provided some background information on the definitions and requirements around reporting teacher absences and indicated there are two requirements that are overlapping and separate: the federal Office of Civil Rights data collection which Illinois has done for a very long time and Illinois State Statute. Back in 2011, the Data Assessment and Accountability Committee on the P-20 Council wanted to make changes

to the report card which brought stakeholders together through the legislative process to deliberate about and negotiate a bill to create a new data point in statute on teacher absence. The OCR includes data for time taken for sick leave and personal leave, and the state statute does not. The OCR measure considers time taken for jury duty and funerals to be absences, but these two situations are not contemplated by state law. The big pressure point in the absence data reporting is FMLA which is counted by the federal government. Sick days and personal days are counted under both formats, and professional development is not counted under either. OCR data is gathered every other year while state data is collected every year and reported in the school report card.

	<b>Office of Civil Rights</b>	<b>105 ILCS 5/10-17(a)(2)(E)</b>
<b>FMLA, paid or non-paid leave, including maternity leave</b>	Yes	No
<b>Jury duty</b>	Yes	Not contemplated
<b>Funeral</b>	Yes	Not contemplated
<b>Education-related conferences, such as NEA, AFT, other education groups</b>	No, if administratively approved leave or for PD. Otherwise, yes.	No
<b>Regular sick days (based on sick days allowed under teacher contracts)</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Personal days (usually 2 or 3 in teacher contracts)</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Professional development</b>	No, if administratively approved leave. Otherwise, yes.	No
<b>Field trips</b>	No	Not contemplated

The IFT wants to make sure that the data used in the study is correct. Definitions drive the data collection as the data collected influences research conclusions. Illinois has been reporting for two years: SY2017 and SY2018, and the IFT is not sure if the data being reported is in alignment with state statute. Currently, the description on the Illinois Interactive Report Card site states that the information was collected from the Office of Civil Rights data. ISBE has communicated that the data being reported may actually be within the confines of the statute, but confusion remains. The report card noted in previous years that the teacher absence data was collected by OCR but has since removed that notice; however, the IFT does not know the source of the data collection for more

recent report cards. The IFT is currently in conversations with ISBE about teacher absence data collection sources.

In reference to the Attendance Commission's student/teacher absence project, the potential correlation between teacher attendance and student attendance, some research has shown a potential connection. Ms. Riseman said the IFT wants to make sure the data that is being looking at is fair data and doesn't lead to false conclusions. She explained that even if the 2018 data is correct, that does not mean the previous year's data was correct. It is unclear whether or not teacher absence data is in compliance with state statute on the 2018 school report card which was released on October 31, 2018. While the context description has been revised, reference to OCR data is still present under the "resources" tab. IFT has requested ISBE demonstrate that data collection is in compliance with state statute.

Ms. Taylor commented that there is no action on this issue by the P-20 Council, so the Attendance Commission must follow through to if the appropriate data is being used in the commission study. The IFT will partner with the commission going forward on this study. Recommendations made by the Attendance Commission based on research can lead to legislation or policy changes that impact teachers, students, schools, and communities statewide. It is important for those recommendations to be grounded in accurate data.

**V. Student Attendance Barriers in Higher Education: Chicago Coalition for the Homeless - State Legislative Director Niya Kelly**

Ms. Kelly informed the commission that the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless is a statewide advocacy organization that believes homelessness can be eradicated through the removal of barriers that stand in the way of access to stable housing. Her concern is in the area of higher education and the numbers of students whose families are not able to pay for their education. Some of these students were previously unable to be eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) if they were enrolled full time in community college; consequently, many thought they had to choose between food or the books they needed for classes as they could not afford to buy both. In effect, said Ms. Kelly, these students were choosing between their present (food) and their future (books).

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless rallied support for a rule change to make students enrolled in Perkins Postsecondary Career and Technical Education programs eligible for assistance and advocated for this eligibility for more than five years. As a result, a new public policy change by the Department of Human Services and legislation (SB 0351 – Public Act 100-0620) will help an estimated 40,000 community college students in Illinois. In 2018, low-income, vocational-track students are eligible to apply for the SNAP food assistance program. Information for these students is available at the community college business or financial aid offices.

Ms. Taylor commented that this information has to be circulated widely especially among high school students so they know of this option to enhance the possibility of their enrollment in postsecondary career training or technical education programs. Mackenzie Montgomery, commission member and representative from the Illinois Community College Board, spoke well of this new development and emphasized that only those students enrolled in Perkins programs are eligible for SNAP benefits. Harold Sweeney

requested information for an upcoming meeting with other truancy practitioners, and Karen Fox suggested disseminating this information to high school counselors.

**VI. Attendance in Early Childhood State Initiatives: Illinois State University Center for the Study of Education Policy, Birth to Third Grade - Continuity Project Director Ashley Long, PhD, MSW**

By way of introduction, Ms. Taylor reminded the commission of the growing interest in early childhood development and the relationship of chronic absence at the earliest levels of education to reduced academic and developmental outcomes for children through their succeeding school years. Dr. Long had previously been involved in the Illinois Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) efforts and is on the leadership committee of the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS). Ms. Taylor acknowledged the importance of Ms. Long's work toward remediating chronic absenteeism in early childhood programming. Ms. Taylor had informed the commission in September about the Kindergarten Transition Advisory Committee (KTAC), which had been formed in 2017 at the behest of the General Assembly by the Early Learning and P-20 Councils, is looking at indicators around chronic absence in prekindergarten programming as a predictor of whether or not a student will transition successfully into kindergarten. People used to wonder about the math and reading readiness of students, and now it is understood that school attendance patterns matter also. When the KIDS 2018 report came out, Ms. Taylor was asked by some members of the General Assembly to look at the report and summarize it for possible legislative reasons. Ms. Taylor emphasized that she is an exceptional needs consultant and does not work for any members of the General Assembly. She wants to avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest, so she asked Dr. Long to present on the KIDS 2018 report.

Ms. Long explained the Birth through Third Grade Continuity Project is in its fourth year of funding through the Preschool Expansion Project. It is meant to ensure high quality, intentionally-aligned programming for early learners with great needs, align curriculum between early childhood programs and elementary school, and offer a sustained high level of comprehensive supportive services which includes a high level of parent engagement, and the assessment of children which is shared across a continuum of partners. It was established as a partnership between ISBE, the Governor's Office for Early Childhood Development, and the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University. The Project works largely with all the preschool expansion communities and utilizes eight strategies so communities have robust, cohesive, intersecting systems around each of these strategies in place: aligned assessments, aligned curriculum and instruction, family engagement and parent leadership, data-driven improvement, supported transitions, comprehensive services, community partnerships, and joint professional development. One size does not fit all, so efforts look different across communities.

The development and application of strategies depend on the data. Data-driven improvements should start with child-based assessments that are developmentally appropriate and should drive instruction, identify achievement gaps, and determine allocation of resources and professional development needs. Data also has to be used across different levels: child, program, district, and community. KIDS data is released in the fall, and ISBE required that an assessment tool be used with fourteen different measures for the collection of data within the first forty days of attendance. Eighty-one

percent of kindergarteners in 2017 were observed (132,378). The KIDS tool is an observational tool that is aligned to state standards and focuses on the knowledge, skills, and behaviors across three key developmental areas that most impact long-term student success: social and emotional development, language and literacy development, and math cognition.

The percent of students who demonstrated kindergarten readiness by developmental area:

- Social/emotional development – 49%
- Language and literacy – 44%
- Math – 30%

These results are not to be interpreted for student performance or teacher accountability as they are strictly observational to determine where students are developmentally and where the needs are.

KTAC was established in May 2017 through House Joint Resolution 24 which states that “the P-20 Council in collaboration with the Early Learning Council shall establish an Advisory Committee for the purposes of reviewing kindergarten transition.” The Committee, whose membership was appointed by the Chair of the P-20 Council, was tasked with submitting by September 29, 2018, a report to the Governor, State Board of Education, and General Assembly that includes recommendations aimed at informing the creation of legislation addressing several specific issues as seen in the resolution. Dr. Cynthia Tate, Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, and Dr. Cristina Pacione-Zayas, Policy Director at the Erikson Institute, were the committee co-chairs.

The key findings of this report -

- Aligned Teaching and Learning
  - Early childhood educators, kindergarten educators, and administrators are supported to participate in aligned professional development during protected release time, possibly through leveraging Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title II funds and others available to educators.
  - Kindergarten educators are supported to implement aligned, developmentally appropriate, play-based, child-directed practices in kindergarten and early elementary.
  - The State of Illinois develops and employs an early childhood through third grade best practice implementation manual.
- Aligned Assessments of Data
  - Kindergarten educators use data, transmitted from early care and education providers into a database facilitated by schools and districts and supported through State of Illinois infrastructure, to begin or continue intervention services for children as soon as possible.
  - Early childhood and kindergarten educators examine KIDS assessment results alongside administrators during protected release time and set plans to mitigate deficiencies and build on strengths across the kindergarten transition.
  - Schools and districts gather feedback from teachers, administrators, and families to determine how to share information and data with an emphasis on whole child development.

- The State of Illinois implements an accountability system in fulfillment of ESSA that values the early elementary years to emphasize to schools and districts the importance of those years.
- The State of Illinois implements a school improvement process in fulfillment of ESSA that supports schools identified for improvement in strengthening their work with children prior to third grade.
- Strengthened Cross-Sector Partnerships
  - Children and families are invited into schools prior to and throughout the transition into kindergarten. This includes participating in tours and bridge programs and engaging with staff who support whole child development and family engagement across the transition.
  - Children and families have the opportunity to engage with service providers that participate in local collaborations to support the kindergarten transition.
  - Communities are able to convene to examine data, organize to support policy changes, and develop support systems for families.
  - Kindergarten teachers are able to visit early care and education (ECE) classrooms before the end of the program year to share information, and early childhood educators are able to provide space within the classroom for kindergarten exploration and discussion.
  - Schools and districts are supported in developing structural connections across the kindergarten transition, including participation in a local workgroup involving parents, educators, staff, and local early childhood collaborations to develop a local kindergarten transition plan.

There were references to attendance in the report especially on the kindergarten level even though school attendance is not mandatory for children under the age of six in kindergarten programming. Other attendance measures would be encompassed in a best practices manual.

## **VII. IL-EMPOWER Updates: IL-EMPOWER Executive Director – Allison Sherman, Illinois State Board of Education**

Ms. Taylor reminded the commission members that Dr. Jason Helfer of ISBE had addressed the commission in early 2018 to inform them about the implementation of the Illinois ESSA plan and IL-EMPOWER.

Ms. Sherman acknowledged ISBE's vision statement which references the concept of 'community' as sharing in the development of the children in the state. She also reminded everyone that it is ISBE's mission to provide the resources and supports necessary to ensure equitable outcomes for all Illinois schoolchildren. Ms. Sherman additionally referenced ISBE's goals, describing them as rigorous and inclusive as they forecast improved academic and developmental outcomes for all Illinois students who will benefit from safe and healthy learning environments.

IL-EMPOWER is the statewide system of accountability and support that empowers schools with choice and voice in the school improvement process. Schools, districts, partners, and ISBE work collaboratively to promote shifts in practice and build capacity. She explained this is not a one-size-fits-all approach as it allows schools to assume ownership over the improvement process by defining their priorities and developing their

work plans. All schools in Illinois received their school quality designation on October 31, 2018, when the new school report cards were issued. The designations ranged from exemplary, commendable, and underperforming to lowest performing.

IL-EMPOWER's guiding principles were developed in accordance with stakeholder input from over 100 focus groups across the state. IL-EMPOWER provides capacity support in the classroom where the real magic happens, where the greatest opportunity for impact is, and extends broad resources to schools with challenges, the schools in priority areas. This is where ISBE can focus on chronic absenteeism because if children are not in school, they are not learning. Conversely, if teachers are not in classrooms to teach children, then districts/schools are not providing the optimal learning environment. Districts and schools are able to view a wide variety of indicators to determine their priority areas. ISBE also believes that teachers in exemplary and commendable schools can provide learning opportunities to their peers to aid improvement.

IL-EMPOWER's nine guiding principles to facilitate improvements include the following: capacity development in management, curriculum/instruction, and school climate; differentiated supports; a focus on equity; inquiry process informed by data; peer-to-peer learning opportunities; continuous growth; shift to school control over improvement process; state support for educator-led improvements, and the assumption of positive intentions.

ISBE offers many broad indicators for success, half of which specifically measure growth in K-8 and graduation rates in high school. ESSA provided a major shift in school assessment as there are more indicators used to measure schools beyond proficiency. Ten percent of schools are ranked as exemplary and the bottom five percent are considered the lowest performing. Most of the remaining schools fall into the commendable category unless they have an underperforming subgroup, like students with IEPs or English learners.

IL-EMPOWER provides the structure for school improvement and begins by helping schools conduct their needs assessments based on the Illinois Quality Framework and Supporting Rubric and other supporting evidence in the form of local and state data. Schools ask themselves reflective questions as they plumb the data to understand their needs and determine priority areas to address and strategies for improvement. They then develop a work plan for local and state approval. They can solicit the support of an approved learning partner at each step of the process to determine need and develop a work plan for improvement. There are twenty-five identified learning partners now although IL-EMPOWER needs double that number to meet the differentiated needs that are identified in the local context. Schools are encouraged to convene a broad spectrum of stakeholders to determine needs, which is not the same as ISBE walking in and telling them what to do. This is movement from NCLB to ESSA. This is an annual process for schools with certain designations, and hopefully growth will be seen from year to year. ISBE supports schools with the greatest needs with equity at the forefront and provides a structure for school improvement.

Anyone who is interested in IL-EMPOWER updates may subscribe at <https://www.isbe.net/support> to receive emailed information about the Report Card, IL-EMPOWER, and summative designations.

With regard to the measure of chronic absenteeism in the school quality/student success indicators, Karen Fox said she is aware that many districts are reviewing their school calendars and policy handbooks to ensure that parents are accommodated and informed about planned school holidays and absence protocols.

Monique Redeaux-Smith from IFT asked what happens down the road to schools whose low designations remain unchanged. Ms. Sherman responded by explaining if a school maintains a designation of underperforming for three years, that school would be slated for comprehensive support. Ms. Sherman said this issue is being studied as is the means toward sustainability of improvements, the resources to sustain improvements.

Patricia Graczyk of the University of Illinois asked about the types of supports provided to lowest performing and underperforming schools. Ms. Sherman explained that targeted supports would be provided to underperforming schools and comprehensive supports are provided to the lowest performing schools. The targeted support schools have the opportunity to choose a learning partner while the schools receiving comprehensive supports must select at least one learning partner.

Ms. Taylor mentioned how important it is for superintendents across the state to tell their stories about efforts within their districts to boost student attendance. She said one way for superintendents to do this is to become involved in Attendance Works' national efforts to recruit superintendents for this very purpose. Ms. Sherman said it was possible that such messages could be communicated via ISBE's storytellers, two people who have been hired to report about effective programming as part of the agency's effort to promote peer-to-peer learning. ISBE's Support and Accountability web page features a link to find the stories that highlight program successes.

#### **VIII. Illinois Task Force on Truancy Update: Chairperson Taylor**

Included within the final report of the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task force was a recommendation that CPS update its policy manual around absenteeism and truancy and ensure administrative procedures are complete and available. Ms. Taylor explained that she was recently asked about the CPS policy manual which has not been updated since 2006. She explained that the focus of the Attendance Commission is statewide and not particular to an individual district that lies within the purview of the Large Unit District Association. Ms. Taylor explained further that she has invited CPS to come to an Attendance Commission meeting and perhaps share a draft form of its policy manual which seriously needs updating in consideration of all that has happened legislatively over the last twelve years. Their current policy manual refers people to personnel and phone numbers at the Pershing Street address from Paul Vallas' stint at the helm of CPS. Ms. Taylor would like to see if Deanna Sullivan from the Illinois Association of School Boards or Jeff Aranowski of ISBE can provide some input in this matter.

Ms. Taylor said she would like to acknowledge Representative Bob Pritchard who has been very helpful in matters pertaining to the work of the Attendance Commission and through his work in the Republican caucus. Mr. Pritchard did not run for re-election and will be leaving the General Assembly soon.

#### **IX. Attendance Commission Hearings, Events, and Awareness: Chairperson Taylor**



Earlier this year, Ms. Taylor had been invited to participate in a Lunch and Learn on attendance sponsored by Communities in Schools of Chicago (CIS) and invited Bartholomew St. John who is the Chief Innovation and Communications Officer to speak to the commission. He explained that CIS is in 25 states, 150 cities, and in the District of Columbia, and their mission is to see that every student graduates in the schools the organization serves. In Chicago, CIS works with 160 Chicago public schools, and in 20 of those schools, they have a full time person. They bring in supports for the entire school community in areas like the arts, behavioral/mental health, college and career, and health and wellness through a variety of community partners. They also work with a caseload of 40-50 students who are significantly off-track with regard to attendance, behavior, and grades. This year in Chicago, they will reach 900 students in a very intensive manner and 750 other students through school wide programming. CIS will be presenting at the January 10 meeting to explain more about their work.

Ms. Taylor also identified the following events and items of interest:

- There will be a public hearing on November 17, from 3:30 to 4:30, at the Hyatt in downtown Chicago as part of the Triple I Conference.
- On January 9, 2019, there will be a public hearing in Aurora.
- The ESSA Conference will take place on February 11-13, 2019 at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Chicago. On February 12, student attendance will be highlighted.
- Illinois Early Learning Project has assembled a number of resources for public use.

Mr. Aranowski alerted the commission to the changes wrought by the funding bill including revisions to the Illinois School Code which eliminated the definition of what constitutes a school day. He said ISBE was going to issue some rudimentary guidance on this matter the following day which places no mandates on school districts. If districts need more flexibility because of innovative programming, they will no longer have to adhere to traditional school day definitions and parameters under the anticipated guidance.

Ms. Taylor responded that one of the statutory outcomes of the Attendance Commission is to define a full and partial school day, and ISBE's guidance on the school day issue is of concern to the Attendance Commission. Mr. Aranowski said ISBE is not offering a recommendation but rather guidance in an initial document on where the law currently stands in regard to a school day.

Ms. Taylor said she looks forward to a collaborative effort such as what occurred when the state needed a statewide definition of chronic absence in order to implement the ESSA plan with the chronic absence indicator to be considered as part of the logarithm to determine student success and school quality. She also indicated that State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia and State Senator Jacqueline Collins are very interested in this matter.

**X. Attendance Commission PowerPoint Presentations: Mary Gallagher**

This report will be provided at the January 10, 2019, meeting due to time constraints.

**XI. Attendance Commission Statutory Outcome Review/2018 GA Report: Mary Gallagher**

Ms. Gallagher, the Attendance Commission administrator, said she began to review the minutes of the 2018 meetings and realized how far the commission had come. She said she realized how so much of the commission's work and so many developments at ISBE had neatly dovetailed into a solid, workable template for change. ESSA, ISBE's ESSA plan, the new report card, ED 360, family engagement measures, and IL-EMPOWER all intersected incredibly well with the Attendance Commission's work. She extracted the primary issues from the proposed outcomes and began to summarize how much has been accomplished in the last year. She said a rough draft of the annual report would be released prior to Thanksgiving and should be returned to her the Monday after Thanksgiving.

**XII. Public Comment**

Alfred Morales, Parent and Community Involvement Coordinator from East Aurora School District 131, was present and asked about how family engagement was viewed as a means of reducing incidents of chronic absenteeism. Ms. Taylor advised him of the public hearing that was going to take place in early January in Aurora that would involve the mayor of Aurora, Richard Irvin, and State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia. Ms. Taylor said the commission definitely wants to engage families as many do not know that even excused absences count toward the determination of chronic absence.

**XIII. New Business**

The College and Career Readiness subcommittee of the P-20 Council finalized their indicator suggestions and changed their Distinguished Scholars designation to include a record of 95 percent attendance in junior and senior year.

**XIV. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.