

# Illinois Attendance Commission

Meeting Minutes  
January 25, 2016  
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

Jeff Aranowski (Present - Chicago)  
Mark Bishop (Present - Chicago)  
Lori Fanello (Present - telephone)  
Karen Fox (Present - Chicago)  
Tiffany Gholson (Present - Chicago)  
Jennifer Gill  
Diane Grigsby-Jackson (Represented by Maria Versher by telephone)  
Heidi Grove (Present - telephone)  
Victoria Jackson (Present - Springfield)  
Madelyn James  
Elizabeth C. Malik (Represented by Rene Heybach by telephone)  
Melissa Mitchell (Present - Chicago)  
Matthew Rodriguez (Present - Chicago)  
Diane Rutledge – (Present – telephone)  
Deanna Sullivan (Present - Springfield)  
Tara Stamps  
Harold Sweeney (Present - telephone)  
Antoinette Taylor (Present - Springfield)  
Scott Wakeley  
Crysta Weitekamp (Present - telephone)

## II. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chairperson Antoinette Taylor welcomed Commission members to the first meeting of the new year and thanked everyone for their understanding when the Commission was forced to cancel its scheduled January 6 meeting due to the fact the State Board of Education and the Superintendent decided to conduct their January meeting in the same video-telephone rooms the Commission had planned to use.

## III. Approval of Minutes from December 4, 2015 Meeting

Ms. Taylor suggested a slight revision to the minutes on page eight, in the fifth paragraph: “She said the Commission doesn’t necessarily have to have everyone serve on the Commission from different entities, but we ~~have to~~ will invite certain professionals in to inform us.”

The minutes were then moved for adoption by Karen Fox and seconded by Melissa Mitchell. The minutes were ratified by all members present.

## IV. Commission Technology Update

- 
- A. Commission Page on the ISBE Website - <http://www.isbe.net/AC/default.htm>
  - B. Email Address - [attendancecommission@isbe.net](mailto:attendancecommission@isbe.net)
  - C. Google Drive link - Will provide a link at a later time to avoid the circuitous log-in route

Ms. Taylor issued a reminder to send all suggestions for resources or informative data to the Commission administrator and to encourage members of the public-at-large to send comments, concerns, and questions to the Attendance Commission via the email address.

## V. **Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force Debrief**

**Chicago Tribune Article** – Ms. Taylor drew everyone’s attention to the statistics in the article and said the student with disability truancy rate would be higher if students with 504 plans were included in the data. The school attendance difficulties of children with documented disabilities, those that inhibit academic achievement and those that do not but require some accommodation, is very high. The nonattendance habits of the children in these two subgroups become then a matter with legal implications because of the impact on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans.

She asked members to familiarize themselves with the article as it prompted several pieces of legislation.

**Legislative Update** – Chairperson Taylor identified the legislation that led to the creation of the Attendance Commission - HB 3197.

Another piece of legislation (HB 3200) was introduced in reaction to the false positives of children being counted as being in school based on the average daily attendance figures that only take into account the best three months of attendance, in accordance with current law.

A further explanation of this practice was included in the Superintendent’s Weekly Message which was disseminated in December 2014.

*The annual “Estimated Best Three Months Average Daily Attendance” application is now available on IWAS. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requests that you provide an estimate of the daily attendance figure for your district to ISBE ....The daily attendance figure is your estimate of the best three months of attendance for the 2014-15 school year. You may use actual attendance data to date to calculate an estimate or develop your own estimate figure based on historical attendance patterns. The estimate you provide will be used by policymakers to determine the General State Aid (GSA) appropriation level for the 2014-15 claim payable in fiscal year 2016.*

Ms. Taylor explained that the reporting of only the best three months of attendance camouflages the actual statistics for the remaining unreported months. State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia introduced HB 3200 to amend the average daily attendance calculation to be based on the previous 180 calendar days. Members of the General Assembly Ms. Taylor has spoken with agree this needs to be changed, but they want the language massaged a bit as they want to give districts more time to calculate their 180 day attendance rate. Ms. Taylor reiterated that it is a problem to only look at your best three months because of the attendance realities captured in the other months. Using current or historical data gives you false positives not only for attendance but for our state report cards.

Another bill introduced by Representative Chapa LaVia (HB 3198) proposes that school districts review and update their policies on attendance-related matters (absenteeism, truancy, attendance) every two years and use the data that they find to evaluate policies.

---

HB 3199 was also introduced by Representative Chapa LaVia to require charter schools to comply with all absenteeism and truancy policies and requirements applicable to public schools under the laws of the State of Illinois. This bill also stipulates that a charter school must define a truant, chronic or habitual truant, truant minor, and dropout.

Ms. Taylor explained that subject matter hearings on HB 3198 and HB 3200 had been held, and during these legislators and participating stakeholders discovered gaps in superintendents' knowledge and realized that some school attendance policies had not been revised in years. An example of the knowledge gap is the fact that the compulsory age of attendance had been changed from age 7 to age 6 and took effect in the fall of 2014, yet some thought it was still age 7. Ms. Taylor explained further that it was found that some school attendance policies at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) dated back to 1996. Many of these policies referred parents and members of the general public to websites that no longer exist and some even bore the Pershing Road address from which CPS moved in the late nineties.

Ms. Taylor recalled that she and State Representative Chapa LaVia met with Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his chief of staff for education (Arnie Rivera) on December 1, 2014. They went over the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force recommendations and differentiated what CPS could tackle directly and what items required legislation. The mayor offered his assurance that CPS would work on the recommendations. Ms. Taylor looks forward to an update on CPS's progress especially since she and Jeff Aranowski participated in some meetings with CPS officials where policy changes had been drafted prior to being presented to the Chicago Board of Education.

Melissa Mitchell asked about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and how it will impact the Commission's goals. She wondered if there was anything in the ESSA about attendance requirements, data recording, school improvement, etc. and added that it will be good to know the content of this bill so the Commission does not try and duplicate something that is required in the ESSA.

Jeff Aranowski said at this juncture, ISBE is looking at the accountability framework in ESSA and referenced the fact that there was a significant reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento piece of the ESEA, so there will be updates regarding the homeless population. He said there will be data requirements that will impact our work and our schools such as reporting requirements for states and LEAs on chronic absenteeism. ISBE is preparing a crosswalk document which will be shared with the Commission when it is complete.

Mr. Aranowski said implementation of the ESSA goes into effect at the start of the 2017-2018 school year. Plans for implementation of the ESSA are due on July 1, 2016, but Mr. Aranowski thinks that date might be pushed back.

Rene Heybach informed the Commission that homeless children's attendance rates in CPS are not being accurately tracked. Since tracking data is engaged only from the date of enrollment, the dates of absence for homeless students who missed school because of their transience aren't tracked. Ms. Taylor added that when you factor in that many of these children are also those with disabilities, it creates a grave concern because a plan is supposed to follow the child and the district is responsible for educational services and related services via IEPs and 504 plans. When children who are homeless are not in school, it is a problem as the IEP is not implemented or it expires. This creates a situation of lost opportunities. Rene Heybach said over 3,000 CPS students fall into this category of being homeless and having a disability.

## **VI. Discussion of the Commission's Five Required Outcomes**

---

Ms. Taylor called everyone's attention to five required outcomes worksheet template to keep the group focused on the outcomes the Commission is required to complete. She reminded everyone that they represent various agencies and organizations and should make an entry into the template if something in the course of their everyday work relates to any component within each outcome. Ms. Taylor said the template will help us differentiate what is on the books and what we might need to take to our legislators.

Mr. Aranowski said we have the potential to do some great work and we have to be mindful that we are responsive to the legislation. The template will keep us focused.

## **VII. Illinois Coalition for the Education of At-Risk Youth (ICEARY) 2016 Conference**

Harold Sweeney said ICEARY is an organization whose members work in the Truants Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP), truancy intervention and alternative education, regional state schools that serve students who have been expelled or repeatedly suspended, the Alternative Learning Opportunities Program for youth who are credit-deficient, and in programs of service to the homeless community. ICEARY includes a wide representation of people who work directly with children and teens with attendance related problems.

On March 3-4, 2016, ICEARY is hosting their annual conference at the Marriott Bloomington-Normal Conference Center. The Attendance Commission will hold a public hearing at the conference on Thursday, March 3, 2016, at 3:30 p.m., in order to hear from the people who are on the frontline, knocking on doors, working with the families of the students with attendance issues. These people can help the Commission members understand what is good with current truancy laws, what isn't working, and their recommendations for things that need to be fixed. The hearing will be attended by representatives from across that state as attendance issues vary by region. The conference is open to the public.

Members should let the Commission administrator know if they plan to attend the hearing.

## **VIII. Consideration of Approaches to the Commission's March 15, 2016 Report**

The first annual report of the Commission's progress was originally due on December 15, 2015, but the due date is likely to be extended by legislation (not passed yet) because the Commission did not begin to meet until December 4, 2015, due to the lack of a full roster. A report is due each year on December 15 until 2020 when the Commission will reach its legislated end date.

Mr. Aranowski said the Commission needs to discuss a focus/format for the first report which must be completed by March 1 because of the routes it must follow to the General Assembly and the Governor by March 15. He suggested dividing the report into sections according to each of the five required outcomes written into the legislation. Mr. Aranowski suggested the formation of a report subcommittee and asked for discussion on the matter. He said the initial report will likely be brief but should feature a roadmap about how the Commission will fulfill its obligations.

Melissa Mitchell suggested an audit of existing state law and policy according to each outcome would be a beneficial inclusion to the first report. She said one of the things we will want to demonstrate in the reports and throughout the course of the Commission's existence is to build on what is happening and what is working, rather than replicate or reinvent things. Ms. Mitchell also thinks there should also be a section that includes the potential implications of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to align the Commission's efforts with state requirements under the new law.

---

Mr. Aranowski concurred and suggested an audit of state policies and procedures as well as local policies and procedures.

In response to a question from Deanna Sullivan about what the audits would look like, Mr. Aranowski said it would be a review of best practices, what has worked in other states, other school districts, charter schools, etc. and what hasn't. It would be an attempt to find innovative ideas that could be extrapolated for consideration by the Commission.

Ms. Mitchell added that the Commission needs to look at existing legislation, statutes, and rules that may have been on the books for a long time and haven't been effectively followed. The Commission must not act in isolation and should look to fill gaps in what already exists. Ms. Mitchell also advocated for a survey of all districts (or at least a sampling of districts because there are 859 in Illinois) to gather data on policies and procedures.

Mr. Aranowski cautioned about overloading districts with additional tasks as they are burdened with many such demands on their time. Ms. Sullivan said her position with the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) provides her access to districts across the state as many use IASB Policy Services.

Ms. Taylor advised that the Commission should examine large school districts across the state for exemplary practices in remediating or preventing attendance issues through the cooperative efforts of regional superintendents and the Large District Unit Association (LUDA).

Mr. Sweeney asserted that he works with 13 separate districts as part of the Boone-Winnebago Regional Office of Education, and he said there are 72 TAOEP programs throughout the state, all of which could provide the Commission with data and information.

With regard to the content of the first annual report of the Commission to the General Assembly, there was extensive discussion of the format and content. It was generally agreed that the report should focus on providing roadmaps for the five outcomes as delineated in the legislation creating the Commission. It was also acknowledged that the outcomes provide a sequential thread for deliberation and action:

- The first outcome advises standard definitions for attendance and chronic absenteeism.
- The second outcome calls for mechanisms to improve data systems to monitor absenteeism.
- The third outcome calls for mechanisms for districts and schools to report the data and account for it.
- The fourth outcome advises the utilization of the data to intervene with students and families to increase attendance.
- The fifth outcome posits the need for new initiatives in response to chronic absenteeism.

Tiffany Gholson asked about the specific needs of certain demographic groups such as those who are in the care of the Department of Children and Family Services, the homeless, and the homebound. Ms. Taylor responded that these groups plus others such as those with IEPs and 504 plans are embedded in the outcomes as attendance issues look different for every child and in every school or district.

Mr. Aranowski advised the formation of subcommittees for ongoing focus on each of the five outcomes for greater specificity. Such committees should be representative of the entire group and create outlines for future work.

Lori Fanello said she and Harold Sweeney would do a roadmap for the first outcome, standard definitions for attendance and chronic absenteeism.

---

**IX. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**X. New Business and Open Discussion**

Ms. Taylor reminded everyone that need to complete the Open Meetings Act training.

Members were also informed that they had to complete the Ethics training anew for the new year as this must be completed on an annual basis for everyone who is an appointee to an Illinois board, commission, or task force.

Ms. Taylor spoke about Attendance Works, a national group that promotes improved policy, practice, and data tracking to increase school attendance. She said a representative from this initiative will be presenting at a future Commission meeting, either in person or via virtual means.

Ms. Taylor said she is also in contact with a representative from ISBE's Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) initiative to speak with the Commission as this endeavor is aligned with Commission outcome #4.

Victoria Jackson asked about a plan for a list of sections of the School Code that pertain to attendance and truancy. Mr. Aranowski directed her to the Google docs website where pertinent rules and statutes are listed.

**XI. Adjourn**

Victoria Jackson moved to adjourn the meeting.

Matthew Rodriguez seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn was approved by all present.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:39 a.m.