

## **Attendance Commission**

Meeting Minutes

June 18, 2020

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 (via GoToMeeting)**

#### **Present**

Jeff Aranowski  
Jean Becker  
Stephanie Bernoteit  
(proxy Sophia Gelhausen)  
Benjamin Collins  
Elizabeth Crider  
Karen Fox  
Jennifer Gill  
Aaron Graves  
Cathy Mannen  
Alyssa Phillips  
Matthew John Rodriguez  
Sarah Rothschild  
Tomorrow Snyder  
Susan Stanton  
Deanna Sullivan  
Harold Sweeney  
Antoinette Taylor  
Molly Uhe-Edmonds  
Kate Yager

#### **Not Present**

John Burkey  
Shenita Johnson  
Mackenzie Montgomery

### **II. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The meeting was held virtually and began at 10:03 a.m. Chairperson Dr. Antoinette Taylor explained the March 19 meeting had been cancelled due to the COVID-19 containment strategy that forced people to work from home. Difficulties with tele-conference efforts during the early days of containment forced the decision to cancel the meeting.

### **III. Approval of Minutes from the January 23, 2020 Meeting**

Matthew John Rodriguez moved to adopt the minutes from the January 23 meeting, and Benjamin Collins seconded the motion. There was no one opposed to adoption of the minutes.

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**IV. Illinois P-20 Council – Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee: Attendance/Chronic Absence Presentation by Kedda Williams, Deputy Director of the Opportunity Institute**

By way of introduction, Dr. Taylor reminded the commission that member Matthew John Rodriguez had been reappointed to his position as co-chair of the Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee of the Illinois P-20 Council, a position he shares with Melissa Mitchell, a former commission member. Ms. Mitchell was on hand to present with Kedda Williams.

Ms. Mitchell explained that the P-20 Council was legislated to align educational priorities and goals from early childhood through college to effect a seamless and sustainable statewide system of quality education and support in Illinois to help children in school and beyond. She explained further that in addition to securing the input of relevant state agencies such as the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Council recognizes that families and community partners play critical roles in the Council's purpose. Additionally, the Council is currently engaged in securing equitable access to educational resources and supports across all different levels and community areas. Ms. Mitchell acknowledged the wonderful opportunity the Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee has in working with the Opportunity Institute.

Ms. Williams said the Opportunity Institute is an incubator project out of Berkley, California that envisions increased social and economic mobility and advanced racial equity through partnership and collaboration with those seeking to promote systems change. They promote opportunity and racial justice through equity, engagement, evidence, and partnership. Their mission is to break down barriers and help systems build capacity to deliver excellence from the cradle through college. They additionally provide direct support to ISBE on the equitable implementation of school improvement efforts and Illinois-EMPOWER and contributed input to the ESSA state plan.

The Opportunity Institute focuses on communities with the greatest need and uses the Illinois report card as its starting point because of the number of components and variety of information available via that format. Among the report card components that the Institute selected for their initial focus was chronic absenteeism. Ms. Williams expressed her gratitude to commission member Susan Stanton for her assistance in this project through Act NOW Illinois. They are developing a resource for families and communities that focuses on chronic absenteeism but is broader than that. The COVID-19 pandemic also prompted them to develop several resources for families that ranged from a comprehensive overview of the virus to a practical guide for resources for families already beset by inequities in the system. ISBE posted this information on its COVID website and translated it into four languages. Ms. Williams offered thanks to Sergio Hernandez, ISBE's Director of Family Engagement, for his assistance in this communication effort.

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Melissa Mitchell closed the presentation by asking if commission members had any ideas on how the P-20 Council and the Opportunity Institute can continue to work together in the future.

Moly Uhe-Edmonds asked Ms. Mitchell what the Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee was doing to engage families described by Ms. Mitchell as “hard to reach.” Ms. Mitchell responded that they are having ongoing discussions with ISBE around the way the agency can support school districts in this endeavor, but Illinois is a local control state which means that a lot of policy decisions and strategies are decided at the district level. They have been working with ISBE about determining expectations and providing guidance around strategies and the expectations the committee has for districts to undertake these responsibilities. She explained further that remote learning has compounded the need for family engagement as so many students lacked the technology and other components to access learning opportunities fully. Mr. Rodriguez also explained that the committee has been engaged with Sergio Hernandez of ISBE around family engagement and asking that districts share resources with parents. The Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee’s resource for parents titled “Where to Get Help” is posted on the ISBE website and provides information about meals, housing, childcare, employment, learning healthcare, and immigration.

Ms. Uhe-Edmonds said DCFS has been providing students in their care with Chromebooks and she wants to make sure that districts are aware of the technology DCFS wishes to offer especially if remote learning continues in the fall. Harold Sweeney said when the COVID-19 quarantine began, they took their truancy interventionists and put them in family support mode to help those who lacked either technology or the transportation necessary to go to the schools to pick up learning packets. They not only acted as the conduits for the learning packets but also delivered the free meals from the schools to the homes.

Dr. Taylor wished to acknowledge Jackie Matthews of ISBE for the assistance she provided to State Senator Jacqueline Collins and herself with their questions and concerns during the COVID-19 crisis.

Ms. Mitchell concluded by saying there is a high degree of variability out there around attendance during remote learning as well as the best way to grade student work. She thinks these issues will be framed through an inclusive, equitable lens that incorporates all the variables in each situation because the COVID-19 situation adds another layer for examination of policies and programming.

**V. Illinois MTSS Network Family Engagement and Family Engagement Series: Dr. Melissa Hannasch, Director, and Lori Hensold, Professional Learning Coordinator**

Dr. Melissa Hannasch opened her presentation with a reminder that Public Act 100-0156 encourages schools receiving public funds to provide a system of support to students who are at risk for reaching or exceeding chronic absence levels with strategies such as those available

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through the Illinois MTSS-N. She said she wishes to share those strategies as well as resources for building student resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meaningful family engagement is based on the premise that parents, educators, and community members share responsibility for youth development. It is fostered through a deliberate process that embraces the school community, empowers adults to jointly support student growth, addresses barriers to learning, is mindful of diverse school communities, and is responsive to student and family needs. They have found that the COVID-19 context has provided an amazing opportunity for them to actively engage with families out of necessity. They are actively providing resources and identifying ways to continue and connect. Their hope is that these efforts will continue to expand. They have developed four different modules for enhanced family engagement: MTSS, MTSS – A Deeper Dive, the Continuous Process, and Evidence-based Practices. All of these are available on their website.

Dr. Hannasch related the success of their webinar in March where they discussed how school attendance is really an equity issue. They discussed key concepts about school attendance and chronic absenteeism and related which levels of tiered interventions would be the most appropriate. Dr. Hannasch explained further that during this webinar they explained there are five basic strategies for planning now for when students return to school to build student resilience:

1. **Expect an increase** in students facing serious challenges
2. Plan for the worst, but **hope for the best**
3. Stay current: **Forewarned is forearmed**
4. Use **evidence-based practices**
5. **Promote** adult and student **resiliency**

In another webinar held in June, the topic was *Planning Now for When Students Return to School: Building Student Resilience through Tier 2 and Tier 3 Supports*. They advised attendees to take the following steps:

1. Identify their vulnerable students.
2. Plan to touch base and include families.
3. Don't wait for them to initiate.
4. Plan for more students in need of support!

Dr. Hannasch additionally wanted commission members to be aware of the resources the IL MTSS-N cited during the webinars:

- District and School Self-Assessments: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/self-assessment>
- Year-long planning: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/year-long-planning/>
- Families: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/handouts-for-families/>
- Success Plans to help parents support their students' attendance: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/student-attendance-success-plans/>
- UPDATED Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: <https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/>

The last resource was edited by Dr. Patricia Graczyk of the University of Illinois in Chicago who is an IL MTSS-N staff member and a frequent attendee at Attendance Commission meetings.

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Lori Hensold began her portion of the presentation by informing commission members of their *2020 MTSS for Equity and Excellence Conference* on September 9, 2020. Speakers will include Amy McCart, Ph.D. and Dawn Miller Ph.D., practitioners and authors of Leading Equity-Based MTSS, who will also host breakout sessions. Other breakout sessions will cover the following topics:

- Leading Equity-based MTSS
- Learning Partner Case Studies
- Data Analysis for Children with Disabilities
- Special Education Supports in MTSS
- MTSS and the Illinois Quality Framework
- Early Childhood MTSS
- Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism
- Family Engagement

For registration information, visit [www.ilmtss.org](http://www.ilmtss.org).

Ms. Hensold said the IL MTSS-N has professional partnerships with the ESSA Statewide System of Support as well as the IDEA State Systemic Improvement Plan through ISBE. In this way they can provide tailored and flexible supports to their partner schools. For the past three years, they were able to host an online community of practice open to the transformation zone districts who were participating in that statewide systemic improvement plan. They address topics that are relevant to that community of practice and they provide an opportunity for leaders to network and their experiences, resources, and tools with their colleagues.

Ms. Hensold provided an example of the support they provided to a middle school in Oak Park for students experiencing challenges with school attendance and proactive interventions for all students. IL MTSS-N collaborated with school staff to -

- create a tiered attendance matrix
- assemble a home/school communication plan
- tailor training for educators and support staff

They also worked to provide special education supports to schools in a cohort of eight central Illinois schools with ESSA designations for children with disabilities with a focus on evaluating whole school systems and multi-lens data points using a continuous improvement model to ensure equity and improved student performance. The learning focus for cohort participants who collaborated in learning opportunities centered on the following five topics:

- Overview of MTSS and ESSA Requirements
- Development of a Continuous Improvement Plan
- Attendance Within a Three-tiered Model
- Vision for Special Education
- Improving Outcomes for Special Education Students

Coaches provided learning supports and provided resources the participants could take back to their schools to improve their special education and general education programming in their schools, including information related to the fact that one of the ways to improve student outcomes is to focus on school attendance.

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Illinois State Representative Karina Villa announced herself on the phone and explained that as a former social worker, she is a great fan of MTSS and a proponent of efforts to ensure children attend school regularly to ensure their future success. She asked what the protocol is for bringing MTSS to a school district and what might the financials be for training staff. Dr. Hannasch responded by saying they first advise districts to look at their system-wide data and to create goals based on what the data shows. The determination of specific goals then requires planning prior to implementation of a tiered intervention process, something that could take three to five years to be operational and effective. Costs vary, and IL MTSS-N provides services to some districts at no cost as they receive funding through ISBE via a federal grant that is about to be extended for one year. Through IL-EMPOWER, they create individualized plans for each school or district that wants to work with them, so there is quite a lot of variability with that. She would love to be able to provide services at no cost across the state through regional professional learning opportunities and have some intermediate coaching supports because coaching supports implementation. Rep. Villa acknowledged the amount of work involved in launching a tiered intervention program in districts and the fact that the process takes approximately five years. If someone skips steps and does not implement with fidelity, the program becomes nothing more than another gimmick rather than a process producing a complete culture change. It starts at the top and people have to believe in it to truly support it and provide the funding for the professional learning and the coaching to implement it.

Dr. Taylor said Illinois is the only state with a PreK-12 MTSS infrastructure and legislation around chronic absenteeism in Illinois cites MTSS as the strategy that should be utilized to intervene with students and their families to resolve the difficulties faced by some in attending school regularly. Dr. Taylor asked Rep. Villa for additional comments on events and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to which she responded that it was devastatingly apparent the difference between the “haves” and the “have-nots” during the pandemic quarantine, from small business owners, to high rates of infection among people of color, to decreased food availability for low income people, to access to resources for education. She said there were so many tales of teachers who were worried about their students’ basic needs because it was difficult to teach students whose families were struggling. She said everyone should be framing their mindsets to meet the needs of the Black and Brown communities who need help the most. These disparities have been noticed by many for a long time, and others are just beginning to understand it. She said the work now is so critical just because there are so many uncertainties around children’s well-being and safety.

Deanna Sullivan asked if the General Assembly was considering convening a special session to discuss any of these issues. Rep. Villa said she was waiting for guidance from the Black Caucus.

## **VI. Illinois Attendance Commission Strategic Plan**

Dr. Taylor referred to the Chicago Tribune series that launched the legislation that created both the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force and the Attendance Commission titled *An Empty Seat Epidemic*. One of the findings of the original task force on truancy in CPS was that the appointment of a standing body on chronic absenteeism was necessary to have an impact. The reason she mentioned this series was to highlight the data that reflected troubling trends for Black and Hispanic students. Over 20 percent of Black students and 17 percent of Hispanic students face barriers to school attendance across the nation compared to 14.5 percent of White

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students. She commented further that the commission has to be very intentional about students in care, students with disabilities, and homeless students. She wanted to let the commission know that the problems cited in the Chicago Tribune article eight years are still very much with us.

Dr. Taylor invited commission member Cathy Mannen of the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) to share a few ideas with commission members about teacher unions' responses to student stress and trauma. Ms. Mannen said a discussion at an MTSS training earlier in the year provided the impetus for her presentation. She wanted to summarize the training and describe how the methods have positively impacted students, including trauma-informed restorative practices and the ensuing decrease in rates of absenteeism. This initiative started about three years with a partnership between the national union, the American Federation of Teachers, along with Futures without Violence and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The IFT has provided training to districts across the state to administrators, practitioners, paraprofessionals, etc. They stress the importance of this being a whole schools system approach to achieve system-wide positive results around the following issues:

- The science of trauma, building protective factors, and promoting healing
- Science of self-care
- Historical trauma, race, and intersectionality
- SB100 and restorative practices
- Systems changes

Additional positive impacts of their training:

- Meets the requirements of Public Act 100-0014 which requires in-service training for school personnel to “develop cultural competency, including understanding and reducing implicit racial bias”
- Builds a foundation for implementation of SB100 and moving from a zero tolerance discipline system to one based on restorative and trauma-informed practices which leads to a reduction in punitive disciplinary practices and racial discipline disparities and improved academic achievement, school climate, school attendance, and teacher retention

Impact on students

- Whole school approach to creating a school community and environment that is trauma-informed and restorative
- Rooted in building relationships
- Transforms school climates so that students build protective factors and resilience to mitigate the impact of their trauma
- Improves school attendance

The work continues through Resolution No. 3: Trauma, Restorative Justice Safety and Justice in the Classroom which was introduced at the IFT convention in October 2019.

**RESOLVED:** Encourage locals to work with district administrators and school boards to provide union sponsored training on trauma, implicit bias, cultural competence and restorative justice for all school staff

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**VII. Local and National Attendance/Chronic Absence Updates:**

Dr. Taylor mentioned that the Network to Advance State Attendance Policy and Practice (NASAPP) had increased their meetings since the start of the pandemic to ensure that states continue to build on a community of practice regarding attendance, truancy, and chronic absence during the final quarter of the 2019-2020 academic year. Attendance Works regularly does research on state information that is publicly available to inform to share with NASAPP. To Dr. Taylor's surprise, Illinois' chronic absence bills were highlighted during a NASAPP meeting because MTSS (Multi-tiered System of Supports) is explicitly stated in the K-12 legislation and is implied in the Pre/K legislation. Illinois is also one of the few states that has chronic absence legislation in place from Pre/K – Grade 12.

**VIII. December 2020 Commission Report**

Dr. Taylor reminded commission members that work would soon begin on the final report of the Attendance Commission which is due to the General Assembly on December 15, 2020.

**IX. Student and Family Focused Response to Truancy: Eve Rips, Policy and Legislation Clinical Teaching Fellow at Loyola University School of Law**

Ms. Rips introduced law students Mariah Woodson, Richard Vadasy, and Noah Hamant who were present with her on the call to assist with the presentation. Ms. Rips began by thanking Dr. Taylor for her collaboration on the effort to see Senate Bill 3841, a student-focused response to chronic truancy, passed. This effort is in response to the 10-day drop rule which is nowhere in statute but is a common practice throughout Illinois to drop students from the attendance roll who miss a number of consecutive days of school without a valid reason.

The problem came to the attention of the law clinic when they learned about a student who had been facing a mental health crisis and had stopped attending school and had hidden this fact from his mother. Not only was he dropped from the school attendance roll, no one from the school reached out to figure out what was going on and provide services. This scenario and others inspired them to pursue student pushout due to chronic truancy because an unwritten protocol that incorporates dropping a student after a 10-day absence is not consistent with the letter and the spirit of Senate Bill 100 which requires that expulsion be explored for behavior that is seriously disruptive or likely to cause harm to others. Truancy does neither of those things. These are the underlying challenges they were trying to address with this legislation.

- Confusing language in the School Code that states that students can be “expelled” for truancy, despite this being prohibited by language from SB 100.
- School policies for removing students from attendance rolls after 10 or 15 days with little notice to the parents are inadequate and punitive.
- Removal from attendance rolls keeps students out of school longer; re enrollment process is confusing and burdensome.

The Loyola team completed a school handbook survey of 40 Illinois schools and submitted FOIA requests for information on services provided to truant students, all of which showed a

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lack of clarity on school policy. Fourteen of 40 handbooks reviewed included a policy for dropping students due to truancy; FOIAs suggest inconsistent and discriminatory application of these policies. They also found that Black and Brown students were disproportionately dropped from attendance rolls. Schools follow many different procedures that often do not provide enough notice to parents or no notice until after removal.

Senate Bill 3841 -

- Clarifies that students cannot be expelled due to chronic truancy.
- Specifies that students may not be dropped from attendance rolls due to chronic truancy, unless:
  - The student has missed 15 consecutive days without a valid excuse; **and**
  - The school is either unable to compel the student to return to school after exhausting all available and appropriate resources, or the school is unable to locate the student after taking steps to reach the family.
- Provides that if a school chooses to remove a student from the attendance rolls, it must give notice to the parent or guardian, in their native language, clearly describing how to re-enroll

The Loyola team said they were trying to build support from outside groups and are currently supported by the Illinois Attendance Commission, Civitas ChildLaw Center, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Legal Council for Health Justice, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and the Moran Center for Youth Advocacy. ISBE has been engaged from the beginning of this initiative, and they have reviewed the bill and found have no flags with their bill language.

The bill was sponsored by Senator Jacqueline Collins (with Sen. Mattie Hunter signed on as a chief co-sponsor) and was initially assigned to the Senate Education Committee.

They hope to be able to move the bill forward in Veto Session.

Dr. Taylor added that collaboration on bills introduced in the Illinois House and Senate results in the same language in identical bills in both chambers. After Senator Collins filed the Senate bill, Representative Villa pre-filed the same bill in the House

Jeff Aranowski referenced the "10-day drop rule" and said the General Assembly, in concert with ISBE, have tried to address this misconception, and a statute was amended in August 2018 that introduced the existing language in that statute which details the student must be a truant minor and have accrued 15 consecutive days of nonattendance and had been offered supportive and diagnostic services which had not compelled the student back to school. He explained further that the use of word "expelled" in the statute revision is not subject to the requirements in Senate Bill 100. People were seeking a term for removing a student from the attendance roll. There is expulsion and graduation as the reigning reasons to remove a student from attendance rolls. He expressed his appreciation to the Loyola group for their efforts to address this situation as there had been discussions about ways to rectify this situation. He emphasized the importance of clarification around this issue because if a student is removed from attendance rolls for reasons other than graduation, transfer to another school, death, etc., the student is considered a

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dropout. Since there are caveats about re-entering school (for example if a student is over the age of 19), some students might not be able to re-enroll.

Harold Sweeney voiced his support for the bill and commented about the fact that it is up to the districts as to what constitutes sufficient supportive services.

Dr. Taylor noted that ISBE officials had been working collaboratively with the Attendance Commission. She asked that people think about the alignment of ISBE's strategic plan with the statutory outcomes of the Attendance Commission.

She also informed members that the Illinois Principals Association had done some work around chronic absence through the Ed Leaders Network, an online professional learning initiative developed in partnership with ISBE.

At the May State Board Directors' meeting, ISBE advanced the draft of the Pre-K chronic absence bill and noted, "the public comment period for the aforementioned rules ended on March 2, 2020; the agency did not receive any letters of public comment." Although Senator Jacqueline Collins, the bill sponsor, previously reached out to the ISBE legislative staff asking to be informed of such processes, she was neither contacted nor given the opportunity to review and have the commission comment on the draft prior to this matter being moved forward. During the May Board meeting, ISBE staff stated that they would follow-up with Senator Collins prior to moving anything forward with JCAR. As of the June 18 meeting, neither the Senator nor her staff had any record of being contacted by anyone on ISBE's legislative team.

Dr. Taylor said she had been in meetings with NASAPP, and they felt there was strong engagement with many families during remote learning. She wondered what instructional choice would look like in the fall because many families felt their children did better during remote learning.

Dr. Taylor asked that everyone on the commission submit a one-page summary on what the agency or organization they represent has learned during the stay-at-home order about remote learning with reference to equity and racial equality.

**X. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**XI. New Business**

Although Harold Sweeney is retiring from his position, he has been asked to remain on the commission for the final months.

Dr. Taylor said even though the Attendance Commission is due to sunset in December 2020, there is talk of efforts to legislate for additional guidance and oversight on matters relating to school attendance. Some wonder if school attendance will remain a hot button issue if there is no commission to study the issue and advise ISBE and the general public.

Ben Collins addressed the commission to provide the perspective of a principal about attendance during the last 10 weeks of remote learning. He said that while there may be anecdotal

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information about students who did better with remote learning than they had previously done in the classroom, the reality was the attendance at his school was very bad. As a principal of a large high school (2500 students), he said they are looking into hybrid learning and other options for the fall as some parents do not want to send their kids to school until there is a vaccine. He said chronic absence looks very different during online learning.

**XII. Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by Harold Sweeney and seconded by Cathy Mannen. There was no one opposed. The meeting ended at 12:06 p.m.