

## **Attendance Commission**

Meeting Minutes

January 23, 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**

#### **Present**

Jeff Aranowski - Chicago  
Jean Becker – Springfield  
Stephanie Bernoteit - telephone  
Benjamin Collins – telephone  
Karen Fox - telephone  
Aaron Graves - telephone  
Cathy Mannen - Springfield  
(Proxy - Amy Alsop)  
Alyssa Phillips - Chicago  
Sarah Rothschild - telephone  
Tomorrow Snyder - Chicago  
Susan Stanton - Chicago  
Deanna Sullivan - Springfield  
Harold Sweeney - telephone  
Antoinette Taylor - Chicago  
Molly Uhe - telephone  
Kate Yager - telephone

#### **Not Present**

John Burkey  
Elizabeth Crider  
Jennifer Gill  
Shenita Johnson  
Mackenzie Montgomery  
Matthew John Rodriguez

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

The meeting began at 10:08 a.m.

Dr. Taylor introduced State Representative Karina Villa who will represent the Attendance Commission's interests in the General Assembly. She used to be a school social worker in DuPage County, was on the school board in West Chicago, and worked as a behavior specialist with the School Association for Special Education in DuPage County (SASED). Attendance was a top concern of hers as a social worker, and she understands there are many reasons why students do not make it to school every day. Rep. Villa has organized an Education Advisory Committee made up of superintendents, teachers, and parents and looks forward to a cooperative relationship with the commission. She is particularly interested in being part of an Attendance Commission public hearing in her west suburban legislative district.

### **III. Approval of Minutes from the November 14, 2019 Meeting**

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There was a motion to approve the minutes by Ben Collins which was seconded by Susan Stanton. There was no one opposed.

#### **IV. Illinois Census 2020 Initiative: Jaclyn Matthews, ISBE Director of External Communications**

Ms. Matthews informed the commission that the census is important for two reasons: funding and political representation as both are based on population.

Illinois received more than \$19.7 billion – more than \$1,500 per capita – in federal funds in 2015 for sixteen different programs such as Medicaid and Head Start. Missing one child means missing out on funding for that child for the next 10 years. Ten percent of school funding in Illinois comes from federal sources. It is crucial that the census count is accurate so the state can maximize all the funding to which it is entitled. Children between the ages of birth and four years of age are a population group that is usually undercounted, more so than any other age group. Nationally, almost a million children in this age group were not counted in the previous census. In Illinois, about twenty percent of children under the age of five live in traditionally undercounted areas. There are big efforts underway by the Governor's Office and Illinois Census 2020, through outreach and engagement, to ensure every Illinoisan is counted to guarantee fair representation and distribution of resources.

ISBE's goal is to reach the practitioners in the field as they are the frontline. ISBE co-hosted Census EDU, a half-day summit convening 250 education leaders, practitioners, and partners to learn more about the 2020 Census and how schools can play a central role in helping Illinois reach hard to count populations. Panels, speakers, student performances, and interactive presentations provided attendees with the knowledge and tools to engage students and their families in the state's 2020 Census efforts. ISBE hosted the event in partnership with the Governor's Office, the Illinois 2020 Census Office, and the U.S. Census Bureau on December 4, 2019, at Malcolm X College in Chicago. The topics covered included the early childhood population, outreach to college populations, reaching families through schools, what is at stake, and the mechanics of the census. The U. S. Census Bureau recognizes the importance of schools to the census effort as that is the best way to reach families. Teachers can also incorporate census information into their math and civics curricula so students can acquire knowledge and be messengers to their families.

To promote the census effort, the ISBE website contains many resources for all to access and is also launching an email and social media campaign. ISBE leadership includes census talking points in all their communiques and encourages school districts to include census information in their school registration packets and for school boards to pass related resolutions. ISBE is additionally hosting a webinar scheduled for February 3 from 3:30-5:00 p.m. to provide an opportunity for districts and schools to communicate their efforts to advance widescale participation in the census. Some are using parents as advocates and mentors to communicate with their peers while others are holding pep rallies and sending out flyers and newsletters to their school communities and to the general public as well.

ISBE is encouraging schools to host Census Nights where families can use their school's devices and internet connection to complete the census online with assistance from school staff. Since schools are trusted voices in the communities, parents may feel free to come in and ask

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questions. School staffs can also reassure parents that the questions are not intended to force people to reveal their immigrant status and by completing the questions online, no one will be knocking on their door. Some schools have engaged student messengers such as at Oregon High School where sophomores have formed their own Local Complete Count Committee to inform their peers, many of whom act as intermediaries with their families particularly in non-English speaking homes.

ISBE has several people in administrative jobs who are Spanish-speaking and they wish to convey the message to all members of immigrant communities that census information is safe, secure, and anonymous and that completion of the census says, “I’m here. I count. I matter.”

Ms. Matthews concluded her presentation by listing some important dates:

- Now – Recruiting census takers ([2020census.gov/jobs](https://2020census.gov/jobs))
- April 1 - National Census Day
- April 27 - Online self-response period closes
- May - Home visits begin

**V. Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) (Public Act 100-0819 - Preschool Chronic Absence): Brenda Koenig, IECAM Visiting Resource Information Specialist**

Ms. Koenig prefaced her comments by explaining that [IECAM](#) collects data on the group Ms. Matthews identified as difficult to count in a typical census, the “vulnerable” early childhood population. She opened her presentation with a quote from Sherlock Holmes: “It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data.”

IECAM provides early childhood data and maps to inform communities and strengthen policy in Illinois. Developed in 2006, IECAM is currently funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). IECAM is housed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and is part of the Early Childhood Collective in the Special Education Department within the College of Education.

Ms. Koenig showed the commission members her organization’s [home page](#) and demonstrated how to access data via the use of the first tab titled “Data Use Options” where one can search the database or search data by topic. Once on the database, you can choose the year or years of data you are interested in and the geographic area of interest. Then, you can click on the demographic characteristics that would help you best describe the young children in your area. One can zero in on specific ethnic groups, poverty levels, and other demographics. When you click “submit,” the database will produce your data in a downloadable spreadsheet. You can also search their database by topic, like teen births or by specific poverty levels. Their topics are organized into the following categories: childcare, demographics, health, language, early childhood services and programs, social and economic factors, employment, and other. IECAM also has a maps and visualization section for many of our characteristics. IECAM provides up-to-date data on the characteristics of young children in Illinois. One can use their searchable database or search by topic to find data for a variety of geographic regions and years and find lots of interesting information, such as maps and charts.

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Amy Alsop, the proxy representative of Cathy Mannen of the Illinois Federation of Teachers asked where IECAM obtains their data. Ms. Koenig replied that much of it comes from ISBE from publicly funded early childhood programming. They also receive data from Head Start, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

Dr. Taylor asked if IECAM has had any conversations with ISBE regarding data being collected in conformance with Public Act 100-0819 -

*Beginning July 1, 2019, any publicly funded early childhood program receiving State funds under Section 2-3.71 of this Code shall collect and review its chronic absence data and determine what support and resources are needed to positively engage chronically absent students and their families to encourage the habit of daily attendance and promote success.*

Ms. Koenig explained that her organization has not received this data yet, but when they do it will be accessible on their website under "Data Search Options" and then to "Data by Topic" and on to "Early Childhood Services and Programs."

## **VI. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Chronic Absenteeism Accountability Indicator Nationally: Kate Yager, Director of State Policy and Advocacy at the Healthy Schools Campaign**

Healthy Schools Campaign is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that all students have access to healthy school environments where they can learn and thrive. They focus on the intersection of health and wellness and advocate for policies and implement programs that support health and wellness for students and staffs. This organization began twenty years ago in Chicago and has worked with the Chicago Public Schools extensively. Ms. Yager said she would address chronic absenteeism from a national perspective and through the lens of health and wellness.

Ms. Yager reminded members that chronic absence is generally defined across the country as missing ten percent of school days for any reason, excused or unexcused, as well as suspensions, and that chronic absence puts a student at risk academically. This is a factor for approximately six million children nationwide, fourteen percent of the country's students. These statistics also reveal the population groups most likely to be counted as chronically absent from school:

- Low-income students have higher rates of absenteeism in every state
- American Indians have the highest rates of all racial/ethnic groups
- African-American children have higher rates than Caucasian students, particularly in some states
- Hispanic students have higher rates than Caucasian students, particularly in some states
- Students with disabilities have significantly higher rates than others

Ms. Yager showed a chart which depicted chronic absence in kindergarten: 25 percent for African American students, 14.2 percent for Hispanic students, 12 percent for Caucasian students, and 5.7 percent for Asian students, all of which steadily declined an average of 50

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percent through fifth grade. A succeeding chart, however, showed that after fifth grade, chronic absence rates begin to rise again and surpass the kindergarten level by eighth grade. High school chronic absence rates range from 22 percent in the early years to 28 percent in senior year.

A study of Rhode Island kindergarteners showed that 16% of RI kindergarten students were chronically absent and were, therefore, -

- 20% less likely to score proficient or higher in reading
- 25% less likely to score proficient or higher in math
- Twice as likely to be retained in a grade
- Twice as likely to be suspended by the end of seventh grade
- More likely to continue being chronically absent

Similarly, a study out of Utah demonstrated that the repetitive behavior of chronic absence predicts the likelihood of students dropping out of school. One year of chronic absence – anytime between 8th and 12th grade - was associated with a dropout level three times higher than is seen in students with regular school attendance. Two years of chronic absence resulted in more than half of those students dropping out of school.

The good news is that chronic absence is a solvable problem but knowing how to address it requires understanding what leads to a student not coming to school. There are three major reasons that students don't go to school: myths, barriers, and aversions. Solving the problem starts not with not making assumptions but taking the time to find out why a student or students are missing school.

- Myths
  - Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused.
  - Sporadic versus consecutive absences aren't a problem.
  - Attendance only matters in the older grades.
- Barriers
  - Chronic disease
  - Lack of access to medical or dental care
  - Poor transportation
  - Trauma
  - No safe path to school
- Aversion
  - Child struggling academically
  - Lack of engaging instruction
  - Poor school climate and ineffective school discipline
  - Parents reflect their own negative school experiences
  - Separation anxiety

Health barriers are significant, especially in low-income communities. The Healthy Schools Campaign sorted the reasons for missed school days into three health categories:

- Asthma
  - the leading health-related cause of school absence, leading to 14 million missed school days annually

- 8.3% of children are currently diagnosed with asthma
- Children with persistent asthma are 3.2 times more likely to be chronically absent
- Asthma prevalence is higher in children who are Puerto Rican (2.4 times), African American (1.6 times), and American Indian/Alaska Native (1.3 times) vs. Caucasian children
- Oral health
  - Children from low-income families are 12 times as likely to have missed school because of oral health.
  - 20% of children aged 5 to 11 years and 13% of adolescents have at least one untreated decayed tooth.
  - Hispanic and African American children are twice as likely to have untreated cavities.
  - Children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school.
  - Children from low-income families are 12 times as likely to have missed school as a result of dental problems than their peers from higher-income families.
- Mental health disorders
  - 13% - 20% of children experience a mental health disorder in a given year.
  - Disorders, such as ADHD, disproportionately impact low-income, minority youth.
  - Analysis of local data suggest communities with higher levels of violence have significantly higher levels of chronic absence.

Other reasons students miss school include bullying, food insecurity and nutrition, teen and unplanned pregnancies, and vision problems.

A chart from the National Association of Nurses was displayed which shows the health conditions per 100 U.S. students. The overwhelming majority of student illness reflected in this graphic was, in fact, mental health disorders with childhood obesity the second most common affliction.

#### Chronic absence under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

- Signed into law December 2015 with bipartisan support, reauthorizing the 50-year old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's education law that governs K-12 public education
- States have more authority and flexibility in establishing their plans and strategies than under No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
- Provides new opportunities for states to support student health and wellness
- **Last year was the first year schools were required to track chronic absenteeism on their report cards, with many opting to choose chronic absence as a school quality indicator**
  - Health and Wellness
    - Chronic absenteeism selected by 36 states and DC in recognition of the effect chronic absence has on academic performance
    - Access to PE selected by four states
    - Physical fitness selected by three states
  - School Climate was selected by six states including Illinois

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Ms. Yager addressed solutions to chronic absenteeism by saying the development of MTSS to address chronic absence is critical and doable. There are many approaches and interventions that can be used by schools that can be tailored to meet student needs and range from low cost to high cost to offer solutions to problems that cause student absence. Among these ideas are community-based oral health programs and mobile clinics for improved dental care, more school meal programs to combat poor nutrition, the development of school safe routes and support groups to counter neighborhood violence and in-school bullying, and school-based mental health programs and screening and referrals to improve mental health.

Connecticut has a focus on family engagement, a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children's learning and development, from birth through college and career and remove systemic and structural barriers. Family engagement allows for more collaboration, partnership, and empowerment.

Connecticut implemented a variety of interventions, from simple to more engaged communications pieces. As a result, the state successfully reduced chronic absence by ~10,000 students across all grades and sub-groups since 2015 as a result of linking chronic absence to their accountability system:

- Lower impact – posters and flyers about school attendance
- Moderate impact – letter sent home at start of school year to previously chronic absentees
- Higher impact – school staff meets with families in community spaces to discuss what students will be learning, how regular school attendance helps students achieve more, and solutions to attendance problems.

In response to Ms. Yager's last comments, Harold Sweeney said that letters are sent out to parents of children in early childhood programs in Boone and Winnebago Counties explaining school is not about play time as it involves active learning. The communique also advises what the benefits to regular school attendance are.

Aaron Graves asked about the current interest in chronic absence and wondered if this is a current fad or something that is likely to remain a focus of interest. He explained further that for a long time in Sangamon County there was insufficient staff to handle absence problems as that was something that was looked at by the regional office of education (ROE). Ms. Yager responded that once the research is in about how greater accountability and an increase in interventions have been effective in improving student outcomes that the case for additional funding can be made.

## **VII. Chronic Absence Indicator - Illinois ESSA Update: Dr. Taylor**

Dr. Taylor said she had a conversation with Darren Reisberg, chair of the Illinois State Board of Education. She explained that thus far, she and State Senator Jacqueline Collins have followed closely the discussions around the possibility of the chronic absence indicator being dropped from the state's ESSA Plan as an evaluative measure in the determination of school quality and student success. She said this issue is temporarily off the table, but the intention to redo the state's ESSA Plan remains a likelihood. Senator Collins has expressed her concern that her office

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be included in any discussion about the removal or the retention of chronic absenteeism in the state's ESSA Plan.

#### **VIII. Illinois State Board of Education Strategic Plan: Dr. Taylor**

Dr. Taylor informed the commission that ISBE is engaged in gathering input on its strategic plan to advance student learning, improve school learning conditions, and elevate educators to increased effectiveness. Two meetings have already been held with the general public and six more are planned: February 3 in Carbondale, February 6 in Wheaton, February 13 in University Park, February 24 in Springfield, March 4 in Chicago, and March 16 in Macomb. Online feedback survey also available at [isbe.net/StrategicPlanSurvey](https://isbe.net/StrategicPlanSurvey).

Dr. Taylor feels that ISBE's strategic plan can be tied to some of the Attendance Commission's legislated outcomes around the provision of supports and interventions to promote regular school attendance. Jeff Aranowski said there are a lot of corollary issues that keep many students from attending school every day

#### **IX. Work Group Announcements: Dr. Taylor**

Beth Crider has accepted responsibility for leading the Best Practices work group, and Molly Uhe will head the Special Populations work group which will now include children in care.

Dr. Taylor also acknowledged that commission member Cathy Mannen of the Illinois Federation of Teachers was named to the Governor's a 29-person commission tasked with tackling the billion-dollar question in state education: How to have the biggest impact with limited funds. Illinois spends an estimated \$1.5 billion in state and federal money on children under 5, but those dollars are not spent evenly around the state and reach only a fraction of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.

#### **X. Legislative Update: Emergency Rules Regarding Restraint and Seclusion: Dr. Taylor, Deanna Sullivan, and Jeff Aranowski**

Mr. Aranowski informed the commission that the emergency rules which were promulgated in November are still in effect. The proposed changes to statute are out for public comment until February 3. The U. S. Department of Education is looking into this as well with some anticipated input into potential guidance, or possibly more. Illinois was cited as one of the states moving more progressively in this regard while local officials admit that ISBE was being reactive at the time.

Deanna Sullivan offered her general observations of what has evolved as there was some initial tension around the rulemaking especially in regard to the need for school personnel to maintain order and protect staff and students. She said the dialogue has been very healthy both in the legislative area and in the rulemaking process. She said she feels the state will wind up with some protections for students as well as the appropriate tools for the sake of safety.



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Dr. Taylor said there is also discussion on soft suspensions (at school but not in class) and “expulsion” which was really a decision by the family to withdraw a student due to ongoing difficulties.

Mr. Aranowski said if anyone wishes to comment on the rulemaking proposals, they can do so at [rulemaking@isbe.net](mailto:rulemaking@isbe.net)

## **XI. December 2019 Commission Report Feedback**

One of the commission recommendations of the Attendance Commission in its annual report dated December 14, 2019, was for Illinois school districts to continue to avail themselves of the data platform available through Ed360, an ISBE initiative. Amy Alsop, proxy representative for Cathy Mannen, informed the commission of some concerns they hear from their members at the Illinois Federation of Teachers related to privacy concerns over data related to teachers and students. One reason is that the sign-in for many participants is through Google and people are concerned with what Google does with this information. The other reason is the fact district superintendents are the ones who initiate the use of Ed 360 in their districts and have access to all the data poses another privacy concern. The more this platform grows, the more concerns there are about student and teacher privacy, according to Ms. Alsop.

## **XII. Public Comment**

There were no members of the public present.

## **XIII. New Business: Attendance Commission Initiatives Post December 2020**

From March on, the commission has to dedicate itself to ensuring that all the legislated outcomes of the commission will be met.

Dr. Taylor also said the Illinois MTSS-Network will be holding its first annual conference on April 21 in Normal. They will be hosting two sessions on chronic absenteeism and school attendance focused on the whole child.

July 9 is College Changes Everything. Dr. Taylor will be presenting at this event.

The commission would also like to continue an idea which was floated at the November meeting about highlighting the work of principals. The Illinois Principals Association has extended an invitation to Ms. Taylor to speak at their conference in October.

Harold Sweeney said Dr. Taylor might be interested in looking at Senate Bill 2332 which includes the following statement which says a principal cannot intervene until a student has become chronically truant. He is hopeful this will not become law.

*Prior to the implementation of any truancy intervention services pursuant to subsection (d) of this Section under subsection (c), the principal of the school attended by the pupil or the principal's designee shall notify the pupil's parent or guardian by personal visit, letter, or telephone of each unexcused absence of the pupil. After giving the parent or*

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*guardian notice of the tenth unexcused absence of the pupil, the principal or the principal's designee shall send the pupil's parent or guardian a letter, by certified mail, return receipt requested, notifying the parent or guardian that he or she is subjecting himself or herself to truancy intervention services.*

Mr. Sweeney also wanted to remind everyone that the annual ICEARY Conference is going to be held March 5-6, 2020, in Normal.

#### **XIV. Adjournment**

Ms. Sullivan moved to adjourn the meeting, and her motion was seconded by Susan Stanton. No one was opposed. The meeting ended at 12:08 p.m.