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7/31/2014

TO: The Honorable John J. Cullerton, Senate President
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The Honorable Jim Durkin, House Republican Leader

FROM: Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
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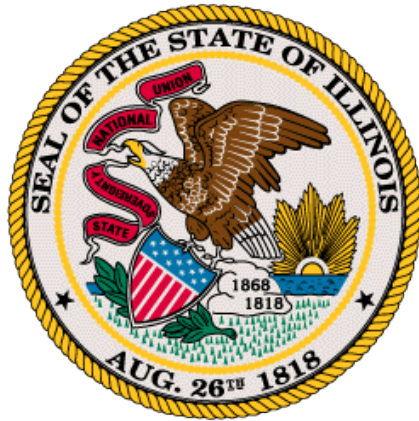
SUBJECT: Final Report of the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Pursuant to its obligations under House Joint Resolution 0001 of the 98th General Assembly, the Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force submits this final report and findings to the General Assembly.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Nicki Bazer, General Counsel, at (312) 814-2223.

cc: The Honorable Pat Quinn, Governor
Tim Mapes, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center

TRUANCY IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS TASK FORCE



Final Report to the Illinois General Assembly July 31, 2014

The Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force was created and operated pursuant to House Joint Resolution 0001 of the 98th General Assembly

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Office of the Illinois Governor

Illinois State Board of Education

Illinois P-20 Council

Chicago Consortium on School Research

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United States Department of Education—Office of Civil Rights

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

House Joint Resolution 0001 (HJR 0001) sought to identify the scope of truancy within Chicago and convene a Task Force to address pressing issues as exemplified by the large number of students in Chicago Public Schools who missed four weeks or more of classes during the 2010-11 school year, including large numbers of students who were in kindergarten through eighth grade, were African-American, or were students with disabilities, according to a series of articles in the Chicago Tribune. The Task Force was charged with the following responsibilities:

Responsibility 1: Identify different strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy and excessive absences epidemic in the district's schools.

Responsibility 2: Support community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in school and in their communities.

Responsibility 3: Promote ongoing professional development to equip school personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing factors to truancy and excessive absences.

While the Task Force understands and recognizes the effects of poverty and other societal ills on school attendance, we also were cognizant of the fact that the response of the Chicago Public Schools to mounting student absences and truancy was not adequate.

Members of the Task Force formed three committees to facilitate basic goals:

- The Best Practices Committee read and summarized notable studies and research on the subject of solutions to trancies that were utilized by members to select their recommendations for inclusion in the report.
- The Public Hearing Committee planned and attended neighborhood hearings.
- The Report Writing Committee drafted and wrote this report based on members' recommendations.

Recommendations of the Task Force

Final recommendation of the Task Force centered around six specific areas, each with various action items and sub-recommendations:

A. Terminology

The Task Force asserts the need for review of terminology related to attendance, absence and truancy for the sake of consistency within districts across the state.

B. Data Collection and Application

- The Chicago Public Schools must provide accurate data that can be easily disaggregated to help inform the interventions and strategies needed to address the ongoing problem of excessive absenteeism and chronic truancy.
- Key stakeholders within the school district (district central office staff, building-level administrators, attendance staff and teachers) must have real time access to attendance and truancy information. To further this goal, the following should be provided to relevant district and school staff:
 - a. Training and instruction on how to review data, including but not limited to, understanding what variables, metrics and collection methods led to the data series;
 - b. Guidance on how to interpret data;
 - c. Guidelines on how to use data to inform strategies and initiatives to reduce excessive absenteeism and truancy; and
 - d. Training on how to use collected data to identify early warning signs of excessive absenteeism and truancy.
- Parental access to individual student data on absenteeism and truancy is also paramount. Accessibility to data for parents can only truly be accomplished if parents and regents of the broader school community are given guidance, training and instruction on how the data are gathered, what the data mean, and how the data can be used to influence positive decision-making at the student level.
- Data collected at the district level regarding truancy and excessive absences should include as much information as possible regarding the student and barriers to attendance identified by the school such as lack of transportation, basic needs, violence or bullying. Demographics, if known, should also be collected, including but not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender, special needs/disability status, homeless status, disciplinary history, history of school mobility, attendance history, level of parental contact with the school and interventions attempted, and any relevant academic information. Such variables can be used to help identify trends and target resources in an effective manner.
- It is recommended that the district create a central database in which school-level, network-level, and district-level daily attendance and absentee data can be tracked, disaggregated and accessed by appropriate stakeholders.
- With respect to state-level and city-level data, the Illinois State Board of Education and City of Chicago should consider mechanisms that align data and information on and resources for student, families, educators and schools in order to track students, but also to provide necessary practical academic and social supports.
- The Task Force recommends that school attendance logs be audited and evaluated on a quarterly basis by central office and network staff to ensure that schools are actively identifying warning signs of excessive absenteeism and truancy.

- To the extent allowed under the Federal Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Illinois School Student Records Act (ISSRA), appropriate data should be shared with parents and community agencies when relevant to foster collaboration and to reinforce and support student engagement.

C. Prevention

- The Chicago Public Schools must engender the interest of students and parents through aggressive messaging, marketing and communication of attendance issues, and there should be an intentional effort to create a school environment that is receptive and responsive to parents and welcoming to the students.
- The Task Force advises the hiring/training of personnel to serve as attendance coordinators to reach out to all students with school attendance issues, determine the root cause for school non-attendance, and assist the student/family with the issues contributing to non-attendance.
- Community-based organizations and governmental agencies with youth services must be enlisted by the schools for the benefit of students and their families and the community at large.
- The Chicago Public Schools system has a responsibility under federal law to locate students with disabilities and provide them with a free, appropriate public education with necessary services to enable learning.
- Under state and federal law, students in temporary living situations are guaranteed the right to attend either their school of origin or the school of temporary residence and participate in all school programs and activities.
- A campaign to create a heightened public awareness of the importance of daily school attendance is an essential marketing tool for the Chicago Public Schools.
- The Chicago Public Schools system is encouraged to continue its revision of the Student Code of Conduct and to reflect trends toward the incorporation of restorative justice practices.
- The district is additionally encouraged to direct that the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program be instituted at all schools.
- The determination of policies, practices and procedures to ameliorate excessive absences and widespread truancy in the Chicago Public Schools must be supported and accompanied by concurrent and ongoing professional development to execute necessary changes.

D. Interventions

- Provide prevention outreach and targeted interventions that embrace a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework that creates system and school-wide practices, cohort level interventions, and individualized interventions as necessary to ensure efficiency of fiscal and human resource allocation.
- Targeted interventions at the pre-kindergarten/kindergarten and ninth-grade levels are necessary to effect change at critical junctures in students' academic and personal growth.

E. Program Evaluation and Progress Monitoring

- The effectiveness of any effort to stem and remedy unexcused student absences can only be evaluated through progress monitoring. As such, progress toward goals must be evaluated on a regular basis by comparing actual and anticipated statistics related to attendance, as well as achievement and behavior. If progress is not noted, then the attendance team has to strategize and apply new interventions.

F. Implications for Further Review and Analysis

- The Task Force recommends that a permanent commission be created that addresses truancy, excessive absences and student re-engagement on a statewide basis; enables progress monitoring of the Chicago Public Schools; and provides a clearinghouse for resources, best practices and data collection related to absenteeism and truancy solutions.
- The Task Force recommends that any further evaluation of these issues contemplate a statutorily directed definition of chronic absenteeism.
- The Task Force advocates the creation of a permanent Special Education Programming Commission to address factors in special needs populations that contribute to increases in absences and truancy among students in early childhood programs, elementary school and high school; among the homeless population; among students involved in the Juvenile Justice System; and among those who are perceived to be harshly disciplined at a disproportionate rate.

Additional Considerations

Chicago Public Schools' administration must review and update current board policies using existing data and information to inform each policy. Upon Board of Education approval, the Chicago Public Schools must immediately create, distribute and implement administrative procedure manuals to all schools (including charter schools) within the district and community and civic community partners.

The current board policy on Students in Temporary Living Situations is dated 1996 and the policy on Absenteeism and Truancy is dated 2006. These administrative procedure manuals were not available for Task Force review.

There are possibilities that exist for the State of Illinois to review current statutes that will not only support the Chicago Public Schools system in its effort to improve attendance and decrease truancy but will be preventive and proactive in nature for the entire state. The State of Illinois should review its current policy on *Average Daily Attendance* and the *Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program*.

1. *Average Daily Attendance*: The current statute yields a false positive indicator of school attendance for the entire state as it calls for the average of the three best months of pupil attendance, which is not representative of the entire school year. A statute change that requests both the best three and the worst three months of pupil attendance will give school districts the opportunity to analyze the gap between the best months and worst months of attendance and use that data to inform interventions, strategies and practices.

Alternatively, a Multiple Measure Index indicator would be a more inclusive representation of student attendance as it would factor in chronic absence, chronic truancy, average daily

attendance (with calculation change), and satisfactory attendance (students attending at least 95 percent of the past 180 days).

2. *Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP)*: This program serves students with attendance problems and/or dropouts up to and including those who are 21 years of age and provides truancy prevention and intervention services and/or optional education. Chicago Public Schools and Community Colleges of Chicago receive about 40 percent of grant funds in the state, with Chicago Public Schools receiving 26.8 percent of TAOEP funding as part of their block grant.

In fiscal year 2013, Chicago Public Schools served 1,915 students with \$3,082,000. Support is necessary for ISBE to have the resources needed to strengthen its oversight and monitoring of per pupil allocations reported by the Chicago Public Schools from block grant funds.

I. FRAMING THE ISSUE

Public schools have traditionally been the educational heart of a community, reflecting the dreams and the realities of their neighborhood residents. When the dream of an education, however, meets the reality of the struggle to survive poverty, homelessness, crime or other social ills, pursuit of that dream can become less of a priority. It is especially difficult to salvage the dream when the local school system fails to intervene with programming and services that could begin to bridge the gap between the dream and reality. As a result, on any given school day, there are thousands of Chicago children who do not go to school; in fact, 32,000 students in grades K-8 missed at least four weeks of school in school year 2010-11, according to “An Empty Desk Epidemic,” a series of stories in the Chicago Tribune that laid bare school attendance issues in districts across the state, but most notably in the Chicago Public Schools.

Historically, school systems, including the Chicago Public Schools, attempted to solve challenges such as absenteeism and truancy through punitive actions meant to compel families to comply with school attendance requirements or face consequences injurious to their legal, financial and social standing. Today, absenteeism and truancy are understood to be far more complex problems involving physical and emotional health, family stability, hunger, transportation and the overall relevance of an education among some youth in the contemporary world. These realities guided this Task Force in its attempt to address the problems outlined in the Chicago Tribune series. “For children born into poverty, the flood of missed days threatens to swallow any hope for a better life. For the Chicago Public Schools, the empty seats undermine efforts to boost achievement and cost the district millions in attendance-based funding,” according to Tribune reporters David Jackson, Gary Marx and Alex Richards.

Additional data from the Chicago Tribune identify the fact that 20 percent of black students missed at least four weeks of school during the 2010-11 school year. Students with disabilities miss school at a rate that far outstrips their nondisabled peers, as 42.2 percent of those with emotional disorders, 15.4 percent of those with learning disabilities and 21.7 percent of students with cognitive impairments, autism and sensory disabilities also missed four or more weeks of school.

Today’s urban schools are held to a higher standard than at any time in the history of public education while welcoming through their doors students who face a host of unattended and untreated issues that stem from a variety of social ills that schools must recognize and address before any productive learning can occur. Ignoring these issues not only alienates the student, who finds nothing in the context of the school environment with which he or she can identify, but also has a deleterious effect on teachers and other school staff who must now work with unreasonable expectations and challenges placed upon them. Now more than ever, the charge of the urban public school has to shift away from one of mere access to education and instead to one of responsiveness to all needs.

Chronic absenteeism and truancy have consequences of untold proportions. Any student who is not in school is not learning. The kindergarten student who is not in school is acquiring a habit that will affect future school attendance. The junior high student who fails to show up is prey to the street gang that will give him what he will perceive to be a community of acceptance and the means to self-esteem. The street gang member will likely become a statistic in the criminal justice system. The young girl who is expected to care for her siblings instead of attending school will soon have her own children to care for. Not only will many of these children fall victim to the same societal ills that plagued their parents, their ability to overcome the obstacles that lay in between them and a full, productive life will seem insurmountable. Where the consequence of an insufficient education once simply meant a future of low or unskilled labor, the 21st-century economy is unforgiving for students who enter the workforce without proper training, skills or faculties as the changing capital landscape has left too few of these jobs in our cities and communities. Absenteeism and truancy today have dire consequences for the future of our children, the

state of our regional economy, and our community health.

The public school of the 21st century must possess more than the technological gadgetry and accoutrements that we have come to think of as the hallmark of a school in 2014. Today's schools must make a fundamental shift in the way they understand their purpose and their work. They must be organizations that stand poised to respond to the ever-changing needs of their students and their communities and to develop thoughtful, systematic responses to eliminate barriers to classroom attendance -- particularly social, psychological and economic hindrances.

Schools with more supportive environments have the capacity to change the trajectory of the life of a student born into difficult circumstances. These are schools where staffs have engaged in collaborative efforts to gauge appropriate responses to the dilemma of students who were disengaged and not in attendance. These are schools where staff has the ability to comprehend the message behind the data, is aware of the resources available for families, has knowledge of tiered interventions to address attendance and achievement difficulties, and does not accept the circumstances of a child's troubled life as something that foretells failure.

II. HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 0001 AND THE DUTIES OF THE TASK FORCE

Highlighted by the conditions detailed in the Chicago Tribune article series, House Joint Resolution 0001 (HJR 0001) sought to identify the scope of truancy within Chicago and convene a Task Force to address these pressing issues. With respect to the scope of the truancy epidemic in Chicago, the following was noted by HJR 0001:

- A. Nearly 32,000 kindergarten through 8th-grade students in City of Chicago School District 299 missed four weeks or more of class in the 2010-11 school year;
- B. Absenteeism in the elementary grades is particularly severe in African-American communities on the south and west sides of Chicago, which are marked by gang violence, unemployment and poverty;
- C. More than 20 percent of black elementary school students missed at least four weeks of school in the 2010-11 school year, compared to 7 percent of whites and 8 percent of Hispanics;
- D. Forty-two percent of kindergarten through 8th-grade students with a disability or impairment missed four weeks of classes in the same school year, compared to 12 percent of students without a disability;
- E. Nineteen percent of kindergarteners were officially listed as chronic truants because they accumulated nine or more days of unexcused absences.

The Task Force was charged with the following powers and duties:

- A. Examine issues and make recommendations related to current State Board of Education and City of Chicago School District 299 policies regarding truancy and excessive absences;
- B. Identify different strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy and excessive absences epidemic in the City of Chicago, promote ongoing professional development to equip school personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing factors to truancy and excessive absences, and support community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in school and in their communities;
- C. Hold public hearings in the City of Chicago; and
- D. Report its findings to the General Assembly on or before December 31, 2013¹.

Task Force membership spanned across the spectrum to include representatives from the Chicago Public Schools, Illinois State Board of Education, the Department of Children and Family Services, county and

¹ House Joint Resolution 0001 required the Task Force to report its findings to the General Assembly on or before December 31, 2013. House Joint Resolution 0059 sought to extend that date to on or before July 31, 2014. The resolution passed the House unanimously, but was not acted upon in the Senate. However, the Task Force continued to meet pursuant to its obligations and crafted this final report.

local law enforcement, public universities, community groups, not-for-profit organizations and various advocacy groups (see Appendix B). The Task Force met eight times between December 2013 and July 2014 and held three public hearings to inform decision-making (see Appendices C and F).

III. CURRENT STATUTORY AND REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

With identified exceptions, Section 26-2 of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/26-2] subjects all children between the ages of 6 (on or before September 1) and 17 years to compulsory attendance.² Further, Section 26-2a [105 ILCS 5/26-2a] provides the following definitions:

A "truant" is defined as a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for a school day or portion thereof.

"Valid cause" for absence shall be illness, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, family emergency, and shall include such other situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the board of education in each district, or such other circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for the safety or health of the student.

"Chronic or habitual truant" shall be defined as a child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days.

"Truant minor" is defined as a chronic truant to whom supportive services, including prevention, diagnostic, intervention and remedial services, alternative programs and other school and community resources have been provided and have failed to result in the cessation of chronic truancy, or have been offered and refused.

A "dropout" is defined as any child enrolled in grades 9 through 12 whose name has been removed from the district enrollment roster for any reason other than the student's death, extended illness, removal for medical non-compliance, expulsion, aging out, graduation, or completion of a program of studies and who has not transferred to another public or private school and is not known to be home-schooled by his or her parents or guardians or continuing school in another country.

The School Code also provides for truant officers, duties of truant officers, and penalties for noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws. As further noted in Appendix G are the regulatory provisions of 23 Ill Admin. Code 1.290 whereby "[e]ach school district shall develop an absenteeism and truancy policy including at least the following elements:

- 1) A definition of a valid cause for absence in accordance with Section 26-2a of the School Code;
- 2) A description of diagnostic procedures to be used for identifying the causes of unexcused student absenteeism, which shall, at a minimum, include interviews with the student, his or her parents or guardians, and any school officials or other parties who may have information about the reasons for the student's attendance problem; and
- 3) The identification of supportive services to be made available to truant or chronically truant students. These services shall include, but need not be limited to, parent conferences, student counseling, family counseling, and information about existing community services which are available to truant and chronically truant students and relevant to their needs.

² Pursuant to P.A. 98-544 (effective 7/01/2014), beginning with the 2014-15 school year, compulsory attendance applies to children between the ages of 6 (on or before September 1) and 17. Prior to P.A. 98-544, compulsory attendances applied to children between the ages of 7 and 17.

A complete set of statutory and regulatory provisions related to truancy and attendance can be found in Appendix G of this document.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

Task Force membership spanned across the spectrum to include representatives from the Chicago Public Schools; Illinois State Board of Education; the Department of Children and Family Services; Chicago Housing Authority; Secretary of State's Office; state, county and local law enforcement; public universities; community groups; not-for-profit organizations; and various advocacy groups (see Appendix B). The Task Force met eight times between December 2013 and July 2014 and held three public hearings to inform decision-making (see Appendices C and G).

A. Definitions and Terminology

Current statute allows for the determination of certain definitions to be done on a district-by-district basis. For example, districts have the flexibility to determine valid causes for absences, such as what constitutes an excused absence. The Task Force asserts the need for review of terminology related to attendance, absence and truancy for the sake of consistency within districts across the state. The initial discussion at the first Task Force meeting was centered on the lack of consensus about the terminology used across the state to define the status of children who are not present in school. It was agreed that the state needs clean and common definitions of the following terms:

- Attendance (hours of learning)
- Absence (what constitutes a full or half day)
- Excessive Absence (defined by 5 percent of days absent [excused or unexcused] of the past 180 days; aligns student absence rates with student chronic truancy; not punitive but reported for the sake of prevention)
- Chronic Absence (excused [suspensions] / unexcused)
- Chronic Truancy
- Average Daily Attendance (with changes in calculation)
- Satisfactory Attendance (Students attending at least 95 percent of the past 180 days)

The Task Force also recommends a change in the calculation of average daily attendance (ADA) as it is currently based on the best three months of attendance and is, therefore, not an accurate calculation of real daily attendance. A calculation that utilizes an average of the best three months and the worst three months of attendance would present a more valid percentage.

B. Data Collection and Application

The Task Force recognizes the importance of gathering relevant data to provide a framework around which interventions may be structured. Data and data systems must be accessible, timely, comprehensive and aligned with all relevant state and local stakeholders. In reviewing the recommendations below, it is emphasized that existing data collection systems should be evaluated to determine capabilities rather than creating new and/or possibly redundant systems.

1. *Accessibility and Real Time Collection of Data.* Key stakeholders within the school district (district central office staff, building-level administrators, attendance staff and teachers) must have real time access to attendance and truancy information. As truancy is likely the result of more than one factor, it is critical that data access to truancy reports be available across the spectrum within the district. However, unless designated staff has a familiarity with the data and the implications found therein, the data cannot be truly accessible. With that in mind, it is recommended that designated staff at the district and building levels be required to participate in professional development related to attendance data monitoring and use at least once per year. Such professional development should include the following components:
 - a. Training and instruction on how to review data, including but not limited to, understanding what variables, metrics and collection methods led to the data series;
 - b. Guidance on how to interpret data;
 - c. Guidelines on how to use data to inform strategies and initiatives to reduce excessive absenteeism and truancy; and
 - d. Training on how to use collected data to identify early warning signs of excessive absenteeism and truancy.

Parental access to individual student data on absenteeism and truancy is also paramount. Like district personnel, accessibility to data for parents can only truly be accomplished if parents and regents of the broader school community are given guidance, training and instruction on how the data are gathered, what the data mean, and how the data can be used to influence positive decision-making at the student level. Therefore, the district should engage parents by (a.) ensuring that all parents have easy access to same-day information regarding their student's attendance; (b.) providing workshops or sessions on how to approach attendance data for their child; and (c.) developing "parent-friendly" reports (easy to read and understand) regarding child attendance and absences. Such self-explanatory reports may reduce the need to provide additional training to parents to understand relevant data.

In addition, it is recommended that ISBE evaluate the possibility of making current enrollment information of students who have transferred out of a particular district but have not yet verified their enrollment in another district available in real time to school districts. In some instances, districts may spend extensive time verifying transfers and searching for students who have transferred out of the district out of concern for these students being "lost" (i.e., dropped out), because the district does not have visibility into whether these students are enrolled in another district in Illinois. Providing such information will enable districts to better focus outreach efforts on students who are truly absent from school.

2. *Comprehensiveness and Alignment of Data Systems and Collection.* Data collected at the district level regarding truancy and excessive absences should include as much information as possible regarding the student and barriers to attendance identified by the school such as lack of transportation, basic needs, violence or bullying. Demographics, if known, should also be collected, including but not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender, special needs/disability status, homeless status, disciplinary history, history of school mobility, attendance history, level of parental contact with the school and interventions attempted, and any relevant academic information. Such variables can be used to help identify trends and target resources in an effective manner.

The Task Force recognizes the need for a comprehensive data system whereby student absenteeism and instances of truancy can be tracked on a state and local basis. The Task Force also recognizes that there are multiple data systems and streams that currently exist, some being redundant while others complementary. Therefore, existing systems should be reviewed to determine whether or not they have the capacity and technological ability to contribute to such tracking. Evaluating the utility of current data systems in this lens would also provide additional characteristics of students such as grade level, gender, ethnicity, home language, special needs and the like.

With respect to district-specific data systems, it is recommended that the district create a central database in which school-level, network-level and district-level daily attendance and absentee data can be tracked, disaggregated and accessed by appropriate stakeholders. This database can then be used for comprehensive monthly reports from schools and networks on student attendance and absenteeism. In turn, such monthly reports can be used to produce an annual publicly accessible district-level report.

With respect to state-level and city-level data, the Illinois State Board of Education and City of Chicago should consider mechanisms that align data and information on and resources for student, families, educators and schools in order to track students, but also to provide necessary practical academic and social supports. The resources include, but are not limited to, transportation, health care, housing, mental health services, home-based instruction, domestic violence counseling/support and food and clothing needs. They should be organized such that students and families at a particular school can easily be referred to nearby resources based on their unique needs and the location of their school and home.

3. *Application of Data Collection and Progress Monitoring.* Though succeeding sections of this document will discuss appropriate diagnostic and interventions recommended for excessive absenteeism and truancy, the Task Force recommends specific actions with respect to data collected and school-level accountability and community partnerships. The Task Force recommends that school attendance logs be audited and evaluated on a quarterly basis by central office and network staff to ensure that schools are actively identifying warning signs of excessive absenteeism and truancy. Such data maintained by schools should focus not only on aggregate attendance and individual attendance metrics but also on behavior/discipline and academic performance. It is also recommended that data be captured to determine the specific interventions attempted by staff and the results.

To the extent allowed under the Federal Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Illinois School Student Records Act (ISSRA), appropriate data should be shared with parents and community agencies when relevant to foster collaboration and to reinforce and support student engagement. Formal agreements with community agencies in targeted communities with high rates of absenteeism will provide a necessary component to the effort to keep students in school and fully engaged. Community partners frequently interact with families in a collegial, more casual way and that can be very productive. With relevant data in hand, community partners in turn should use this information to set goals for their staff to encourage and support attendance of the students they serve.

C. Prevention

It is critical that the Chicago Public Schools create policy and develop procedures to inhibit the spread of absenteeism and truancy, described by the Chicago Tribune as an epidemic. The proverbial ounce of prevention can be found in the words of Robert Blum of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University:

“When students believe that adults in the school care about them, have high expectations for their education, and will provide the support essential to their success, they thrive. When teachers and staff are deeply engaged in creating a safe, nurturing, (and) challenging school environment, their job satisfaction increases.”

Prevention recommendations from the Task Force are many and, as can be seen below, touch on district, school-based, parental and community solutions.

1. *Family Engagement.* The Chicago Public Schools must engender the interest of students and parents through aggressive messaging, marketing and communication of attendance issues, both individually and system-wide. There should be an intentional effort to create a school environment that is receptive and responsive to parents and welcoming to the students. Children of any age benefit enormously when a staff person -- any staff person from the principal to a custodian -- recognizes them, inquires about their well-being, or acknowledges their presence in some way. “Someone at the school has to care that a student does not appear in class *that day* and has to engage with the missing youth and his/her caregiver promptly in a helpful manner,” explained a Task Force member. School environment and school connectedness can be the determining factors in a young person’s educational experience.

The same is additionally true for parents. Teachers, support staff and administrators should be trained in relationship-based approaches toward working with families. Social/emotional learning strategies should also be embraced in schools in order to establish and maintain authentic relationships (UChicago CCSR). Families are more likely to engage in their children’s school and education when they feel respected, supported and included. Schools with strong parent-teacher relationships and high trust levels and safe schools have lower absence rates, according to the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. “Effective communication and collaboration with parents and the community will promote better outcomes for students. Research demonstrates that parental support and value of education is a consistent predictor of children’s academic achievement” (Blum).

It is necessary to understand the needs of students and families at regular cadences to ensure accurate diagnoses of problems and timely delivery of supports and interventions. It is additionally important to respond in a time of need, when a parent is making a critical but tentative step on behalf of a child. One Task Force member emphasized this point when she stated in one meeting, “If we don’t offer something in the moment that matters, we have lost that moment.”

The Chicago Public Schools must establish clear family engagement policies and best practices to encourage the participation of parents in school activities and to provide them with continuing education on issues related to academics, parenting skills and social issues that directly impact their children (gangs, drugs, etc.). These efforts should emphasize additional family-oriented programs to address the fundamental needs of students and families and create opportunities for parents to interact, build support networks, and experience shared learning opportunities.

2. *Community Engagement.* Community-based organizations (CBOs) must additionally be enlisted by the schools for the benefit of students and their families and the community at large. According to the U. S. Department of Education, “Community-based organizations, both secular and faith-based, are essential partners in the educational achievement of American students ... (as they) expand the learning time and experiences for students, support the full range of student needs, engage families, and foster a community culture of education success.”

The home-school-community partnership helps to ensure that children have a foundation of academic and social support both inside and outside of school. These relationships need to be nurtured and coordinated in ways that benefit children and their families. CBOs have the capability to work with parents to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors and have the means to link to or provide resources in support of those efforts. A school or a district collaboration with CBOs and other non-profit agencies can provide another level of support for families with attendance challenges that emerge from socio-economic factors. Partnerships between a school and a CBO will entail increased access of the CBO to school events and programs in order to assist at-risk students and their families. As a participant in the effort to improve school attendance, the CBO must additionally have access to professional development related to this issue as well as relevant data.

To the extent allowed under FERPA and ISSRA, the CPS should share attendance data on a daily basis with parents and on a weekly basis with CBOs to foster collaboration and to reinforce and support student engagement. Formal data-sharing agreements (via memoranda of understanding) with community agencies in targeted communities with high rates of absenteeism will provide a necessary component to the effort to keep students in school and fully engaged as community partners frequently interact with families in a collegial, more casual way which can be very productive. This will ensure timely access to data and reporting for relevant stakeholders, including an early warning system to ensure student and family needs are met.

The Chicago Public Schools should also establish/enhance partnerships with critical city partners such as the Chicago Park District, Chicago Housing Authority and YMCA to enhance access to services and extended learning opportunities and form alliances with employers in the private business sector for training and job opportunities.

3. *Engaging Population Subgroups.* There are certain subgroups in the Chicago Public Schools' school population that experience an extremely high rate of absenteeism and truancy. These include children who are in temporary living situations and students with disabilities. The latter two groups are entitled, under law, to access district educational services and programs.

Under state and federal law, students in temporary living situations (homeless students) have the right to attend their school of origin (the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled) or the school of residence (the public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend). For purposes of students in temporary living situations, "enrollment" means full enrollment and participation in all school programs and activities. Such students must be immediately enrolled even if they lack required paperwork, documents, immunizations or other items normally required for enrollment. It is the duty of the enrolling school to immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic and other records. Districts have the duty to enroll students presenting themselves as homeless and to identify homeless students. Task Force members who represent the needs of the homeless report frequent and ongoing problems encountered by parents who attempt to enroll their children in the Chicago Public Schools. They allege the existence of practices that discourage student enrollment and attendance such as turning them away at the door, failing to inform about the special rights of homeless students, charging fees, lack of transportation, excessive discipline, excessive and high-stakes testing, dropping students for excessive absences, and failure to provide uniforms.

Students with disabilities also have an absence rate that far exceeds their nondisabled peers. In the Chicago Tribune series, “The Empty Desk Epidemic,” it was reported that approximately 17,000 Chicago Public School students are diagnosed as having a learning disability, “a disorder generally affecting the ability to use or understand language. On average, each of these 17,000 students racked up two weeks of truancy and excused absences in the 2010-11 school year. That’s about 20 percent more than those with no disability.” Students in grades K-8 with emotional disorders, “children whose behavior or feelings impede their learning and ability to get along with others, missed four weeks of school to truancy and other absences. They also accrued 10 times as many suspension days as children without a disability, the Tribune’s analysis found.” The Tribune article explained further:

Federal law requires schools to provide these students with ... support to help them succeed, and it specifically protects them from being excluded from school through excessive suspensions or informal push-outs.

But in Chicago, advocates for the disabled say, many children with learning and emotional disabilities go undiagnosed for too long and are then given inadequate assistance. Alienated from classrooms they find humiliating and unrewarding, youth tend to tune out or lash out, leading to suspensions and other missed days.

Students with disabilities are protected under law also, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees “that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.” (IDEA 34 CFR §300.1)

According to Aleeza Strubel of the Office for Civil Rights in Chicago, a student with a disability is entitled to have access to an education with whatever services and resources are needed to give the child an equal opportunity for an appropriate public education. “We are not saying every student should have the opportunity to get straight A’s. We are saying they should have equal opportunity to a level playing field, to compete and participate, whether it is in a classroom or in an extracurricular activity,” she said.

Teachers and administrators should heed red flags that indicate a student’s need for an evaluation, such as a lack of achievement, manifestation of chronic behavior problems, and/or chronic absenteeism. Additionally, parents may suspect a disability and raise it with the school. The school must respond as school authorities cannot disregard a parent’s request for an evaluation.

Ms. Strubel explained further that it is not simply up to the parents to inform the district that their child has a disability; the district has an affirmative obligation to locate and identify students with disabilities who are not receiving a public education (Child Find). This is an area where truancy is a key factor. The district has to proactively make its policies and procedures known and make a reasonable effort toward finding failing and non-attending students. This includes examining and analyzing attendance and achievement statistics. Of the many tens of thousands of students who are truant, a fair number of them are students with disabilities who have yet to be identified as a student with a disability, have yet to receive services, or who have benefited neither from an evaluation nor from the knowledge of a special educational professional who could facilitate the access of these children to an education.

Absence patterns for students with disabilities that develop in the early grades often become deeply rooted habits by the time these children are in middle school. Many of these children are already burdened by virtue of their lower socio-economic status and related hardships, but have to

contend with the complication of a disability that impacts their ability to achieve academically in the classroom. Many are reluctant to attend school and develop patterns of absence due in part to unaddressed secondary issues that impede learning and personal growth, failure to implement the Individualized Education Program (IEP) with fidelity, the provision of inadequate services that do not address learning or behavioral difficulties appropriately, removal from the general education setting, transportation dilemmas, and peer relationship challenges. Sometimes absence becomes a means of escape or avoidance due to an inability to meet the classroom educational/social standards and feelings of inadequacy that can result in low self-confidence/esteem, anger, misunderstandings, etc. that may be exhibited in inappropriate/avoidance behaviors.

4. *Public Awareness Campaign.* The creation of a compelling public awareness campaign around the importance of school attendance every day by every student is a strategy adopted by many other cities across the country that struggled with absenteeism and truancy issues. New York City garnered national media attention when officials there embarked on a massive media blitz involving public service announcements on radio and TV, advertising on public transportation, and celebrity wake-up calls to raise individual and public awareness of the importance of being in school.

Any effort to reach young people and their families to promote school attendance is time well-spent. Students and parents should be engaged through aggressive messaging, marketing and communication of attendance issues, both individually and system-wide. This includes recognizing strong and improved attendance in ways that celebrate the successes and elevate attendance to a higher status among critical outcomes. It is essential that the reality of life without an education be communicated to children and families, that they understand that time spent away from the classroom will result in lower levels of academic achievement, diminished chances to obtain a high school diploma and greatly reduced job prospects.

Heightened awareness within the community at large will further enable the Chicago Public Schools to invite more stakeholders to contribute in additional ways. Volunteer organizations and CBOs can assist with outreach to students and families to provide or link to invaluable resources to support school re-integration efforts. These same groups can assist with the dissemination of strategies and technical assistance programs to inform the public about school-level, network-level and district-level efforts to support student attendance. Early childhood care providers can play a critical role in promoting school attendance in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, although regular communication and outreach may be needed in order to inform and connect early childhood care providers to attendance policies and practices in the district.

5. *Addressing Excessive Absences.* The Chicago Public Schools system is encouraged to continue its revision of the Student Code of Conduct and to reflect trends toward the incorporation of restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is an approach to school discipline that emphasizes repairing the harm done by a student's transgression and moving to restore relationships through a multi-tiered model of interventions. Restorative justice practices encourage students to be empathetic, respectful, honest and accountable -- among other virtues -- and provide ways to effectively address behavior and other complex school issues, offer a supportive environment that can improve learning, improve safety by preventing future harm, and offer alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Ashley and Burke). "Students are often unaware of the harmful impact of their behavior on themselves and others. Handling conflict and misbehavior in a restorative way allows students and staff to actively make amends and repair harm. In addition, restorative practices in schools can promote positive feelings, rather than resentment and alienation within the school setting (Skager).

The district is specifically encouraged to direct that the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program be instituted at all schools. According to the U. S. Department of Education, “PBIS is a decision-making framework that guides the selection, integration and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for all students.” Parent trainings can incorporate aspects of PBIS for use in the home.

The utilization of MTSS, including PBIS, and restorative practices requires the provision of professional development in order to ensure fidelity to the core principles of each endeavor. The district should develop training for teachers, administrators and families on how to create an individual absenteeism prevention plan. Also, to stem the rising tide of student absenteeism and truancy through policy and program changes, there must be greater administrator accountability for chronic absenteeism and truancy rates, not just average daily attendance. Additionally, schools that are implementing best practices should be identified and mechanisms for sharing and replicating those practices across the district.

6. *Attendance Coordinator.* The strategy most often identified as necessary to combat absenteeism and truancy in the Chicago Public Schools by reporters, researchers, community leaders and parents was the re-institution of truancy officers. According to the Chicago Tribune, “... as the sole institution that has consistent contact with every youth, schools bear an inescapable burden to identify and retrieve missing students.”

Those who support the re-instatement of truancy officers recommend that the job description be expanded to include additional responsibilities and expanded qualifications. The truancy officers of yesterday are the attendance coordinators of today and considered by many who have researched absenteeism and truancy causes and solutions to be of paramount importance in any constructive effort. Attendance coordinators are people with academic backgrounds in psychology or social work who can provide ongoing data analysis, coordinate intervention programming, develop or adapt initiatives, assess programs, and maintain contact with truant/absent students and their families. These professionals must have the capability to reach out to all students with school attendance issues, determine the root cause for school non-attendance, and assist the student/family with the issues contributing to non-attendance. In these tasks, attendance coordinators should be skilled in developing responsive and supportive relationships with both students and their families. An attendance coordinator should be on staff at any school with a chronic truancy rate greater than 5 percent. Schools with fewer chronic truants could assign someone to the position of attendance coordinator on a part time basis or avail themselves of the services of an attendance coordinator who works on a network basis.

Schools with an average daily attendance rate (ADA) of less than 95 percent should identify an attendance coordinator. If schools within the Chicago Public Schools’ network collectively have ADA rates higher than 95 percent, an attendance coordinator can be employed on a network basis.

The Task Force was privileged to count among its members Ms. Dana Wright, first deputy chief of police for the Cook County Sheriff’s Police Department, who had extended an invitation to a truancy coordinator working for her department to attend the monthly meetings, sometimes as her proxy. Officer Tangenise Porter was asked in January of 2014 to begin truancy duties on behalf of the department in the south suburban towns of Robbins and Posen as she had a degree in psychology and was aware of the network of resources for children and families in that area and through various governmental entities and social service organizations. Officer Porter reported a

drastic reduction in the number of truant students in the district to which she was assigned as she was able to direct students and families to the appropriate resources.

To ensure that individuals within a district/school can administer the demands of the attendance coordinator position with full knowledge and capability, the state should encourage state universities to offer related coursework and should consider the certification of personnel with the appropriate background.

Legislation should be enacted to require the use of attendance coordinators in districts where average daily attendance is below 95 percent. Attendance coordinators should have an academic background in either psychology or social work and be trained in non-adversarial approaches, sensitivity and diversity.

7. *Professional Development.* The determination of policies, practices and procedures to ameliorate excessive absences and widespread truancy in the Chicago Public Schools must be supported and accompanied by concurrent and ongoing professional development to execute necessary changes. The Chicago Public Schools must provide and require professional development throughout the year about the importance of school attendance, the critical factors resulting in non-attendance, and the implementation of successful evidence-based practices. This should occur across all departments, at all staff levels, and among all employees of the schools. Attendance and student engagement needs to be clearly tied to district, school, principal, teacher and partner goals. Truancy, absenteeism, attendance and engagement should be priorities for the year with an ongoing series of professional development designed to help schools unpack absenteeism data, develop plans to address underlying causes of chronic absenteeism and truancy, implement plans, track progress, and engage partners in support of efforts.

- All staff must be trained on family engagement policies.
- Relevant staff must be trained on data analysis.
- Relevant staff must receive training on the provision of interventions to remedy deficiencies in attendance, behavior and achievement.
- Relevant staff must receive professional development related to the content of state and federal law regarding the guarantees afforded students who are homeless or who are diverse learners (special education).
- Relevant staff must be trained on the utilization of multi-tiered systems of support in order to provide appropriate interventions to students with academic, attendance or behavioral deficiencies.

D. Interventions

Intervention is necessary whenever chronic absenteeism and truancy occur and supports must be provided appropriate to the situation. Provide prevention outreach and targeted interventions that embrace a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework that creates system and school-wide practices, cohort-level interventions and individualized interventions as necessary to ensure efficiency of fiscal and human resource allocation (See #3).

1. *Early Childhood Education.* The benefits of early childhood education have been well documented; children who have the benefit of quality educational programming in the early years have greater chances for academic and personal success. Among the youngest students in the Chicago Public Schools, however, there is an absentee rate that is astonishingly high. “Almost half of 3-year-old preschool students and one-third of 4-year-old preschoolers are chronically absent,” according to the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Interventions to change the attendance patterns of these students is of critical importance in order to provide them with the academic advantage an early education offers, but also to create a healthy approach to school attendance. When students in pre-kindergarten as well as kindergarten and the primary grades are excessively absent, the Chicago Public Schools must formalize a process to contact families of youngsters to emphasize the importance of school attendance. In the event the absences escalate into chronic absences, staff must intervene through phone contacts, home visits and referral to appropriate agencies and neighborhood organizations for needed services (child-care problems, transportation difficulties, temporary living situations, parental illness, drug and alcohol dependency, mental health issues, etc.). The Chicago Public Schools must develop pre-kindergarten guidelines aligned to K-12 policy and guidelines for attendance to establish early expectations around attendance. Every effort must be made on behalf of the youngest school enrollees to ensure they are present in school, learning and acquiring the habit of daily school attendance.

“Preschool children who enter preschool with lower skills are most likely to be chronically absent AND have lower reading/word recognition scores at end of preschool; all children who are chronically absent from preschool have lower social-emotional scores at end of preschool year regardless of skill level” (Ehrlich).

2. *Ninth Grade On-track Indicator.* In 2007, the Chicago Public Schools began a focus on ninth-grade students to ensure they were encouraged to stay on track and graduate from high school in four years. This effort was the result of University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) research reports that demonstrated that a focus on students who were just beginning high school and were at risk for failure would result in a higher graduation rate. Students who are absent at the ninth-grade level are making choices that will alter the trajectory of their lives as their absence from school translates into lower achievement levels and limits their future employability. Some find the transition to high school to be a difficult one with a more challenging curriculum and less direct contact with teachers. The CCSR report demonstrated that “the on-track indicator provides a simple quantitative measure of whether ninth-graders are making adequate progress to graduation based on their credit completion and course failures. Specifically, a student is considered “on track” if she has enough credits to be promoted to 10th grade and had earned no more than one semester F in a core course.”

“Chicago has been in the forefront of the country in its use of 9th-grade indicators of dropout. Catalyzed by the development of the freshman on-track indicator and research around it, Chicago school administrators, central office personnel, and external partners have developed a number of mechanisms using 9th-grade indicators to stimulate school improvement. (The) ways in which early warning indicators are useful for improving student achievement (are): (a) focusing conversations and efforts on actionable problems; (b) identifying students for intervention; and (c) using indicator patterns to address low performance in a strategic way” (Allensworth). The Network for College Success at the University of Chicago has provided support for high schools that have chosen to focus on the ninth-grade on-track indicator. Acting in an advisory capacity, the Network has supported school attendance teams in their efforts to analyze and use

their attendance data to shape and strengthen their efforts to help students stay on track to academic achievement and graduation.

The Task Force advises that all CPS high schools focus on the ninth- grade on-track indicator with the formation of attendance teams and training for all staff on how to analyze and utilize their data in order to intervene on behalf of young high school students who present signs of being at risk for failure. It would also be beneficial to use the ninth-grade on-track indicator as an avenue to target interventions with external supports, further engaging community and government partners to reach at-risk youth.

3. *Multi-tiered Systems of Support.* There must be a formalized process at all schools for handling chronic absenteeism and truancy including specific timelines at which escalating interventions should be applied. At the March Task Force meeting, Michele Carmichael of ISBE and Roberta Brown of the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Collaborative (ISTAC) were asked to explain the programming available for districts that wish to increase their capacity to address a variety of student needs. Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) have proven successful in directing resources to the areas of greatest need as determined through a careful examination of data and the application of escalating interventions.

Ms. Carmichael said schools have to develop protocols, procedures and practices to foster school improvement and responsiveness to student academic and functional needs. Alignment of goals, collaboration of efforts, and integration of solutions will improve the educational experience of many students by removing barriers that inhibit success. An integrated approach is the efficient and the most effective. “Instead of just focusing on truancy, you should figure out how this issue impacts other areas of students’ lives. Truancy is just one indicator of a problem. Data is not a four-letter word. Data in and of itself is useless if it is not used for problem solving. Drill down into the data and keep asking why.” The Chicago Public Schools should provide prevention outreach and targeted interventions that embrace an MTSS framework that creates system and school-wide practices, cohort-level interventions and individualized interventions as necessary to ensure efficiency of fiscal and human resource allocation.

Schools must either provide access to healthcare, including mental health and wellness activities, or have knowledge of resources available for students and their families to access on their own. There should be access to alternative programs for high school students with attendance problems, including opportunities to learn job and vocational skills. The Chicago Public Schools should provide opportunities for student re-engagement, both through centers and school-based personnel, to guide re-entry into school and provide mentors to students who are at risk for absenteeism.

E. Program Evaluation and Progress Monitoring

The effectiveness of any effort to stem and remedy unexcused student absences can only be evaluated by progress monitoring through the utilization of the MTSS model. The initial efforts of a school or the district to ameliorate unexcused absences should begin with a clear definition of the problem after careful examination and dissection of student data. Once the problem is identified, the process continues with a determination of goals to drive progress: improved attendance school-wide or district-wide, improved attendance among certain identified students, improved grades among certain identified students, and increased participation of parents in school activities, among other possibilities. The components of the plan of action to correct the problem must correlate to the selected goals (National Center for School Engagement).

Progress toward goals must be evaluated on a regular basis by comparing actual and anticipated statistics related to attendance, as well as achievement and behavior. If progress is not noted, then the attendance team has to strategize and apply new interventions.

The data that are gathered will tell the story at every step in the process. Whether a school attendance team drills deeply into the data to define the problem, solve the problem, or gauge the accuracy or efficacy of the solution, they will need to extrapolate the truths buried deep within the numbers.

F. Implications for Further Review and Analysis

The Task Force recognizes that not all issues may have been addressed in its recommendations to the General Assembly and would like to ensure that implications for further review and action are provided. The following constitute actions that should be contemplated for future action as the current task force dissolves.

1. *Creation of a Permanent Statewide Truancy and Re-engagement Commission.* The work of the Task Force lends itself to a long-term commitment by public, private and not-for-profit entities. To ensure this commitment, the Task Force recommends that a permanent commission be created that addresses truancy, excessive absences and student re-engagement on a state-wide basis. Proposed functions of the commission include:
 - a) *Accountability and Progress Monitoring.* A commission created pursuant to this recommendation would be able to systematically review efforts by districts, including Chicago Public Schools, in addressing truancy and excessive absences and report on the success of implemented measures.
 - b) *Central Clearinghouse for Resources, Best Practices and Data Collection.* A permanent commission could be tasked as the central clearinghouse for resources and best practices related to student attendance and truancy. Further, the commission could be charged with collecting, maintaining and evaluating data.

It is recommended that the commission be multi-disciplinary and multi-agency to ensure broad-based content area expertise. It is further recommended that the commission submit an annual report to the General Assembly and the Illinois State Board of Education regarding attendance, truancy and re-engagement efforts and practices statewide and in identified districts.

2. *Define and Track Chronic Absenteeism.* The Task Force realized early in its deliberations that though precipitating causes may differ, academic losses occur due to chronic absenteeism (including for excused absences) and truancy. As such, the Task Force recommends that any further evaluation of these issues contemplate a statutorily directed definition of chronic absenteeism. In such way, valid comparisons could be drawn between districts that experience elevated rates of chronic absenteeism as opposed to only chronic truancy.
3. *Creation of a Permanent Special Education Programming Commission.* Over the past eight months the common and consistent thread in discussions about the impact of high levels of absenteeism and truancy for students in early childhood programs, elementary school, high school, the homeless population, students who are or have been involved in the Juvenile Justice System, and among those who are perceived to be harshly disciplined at a disproportionate rate is the community of students with a disability or impairment. This high potential population is disproportionately impacted on every level, in every category.

The Department of Human Services, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the State of Illinois seek to improve special education programming and align the state's current focus in areas that include but are not limited to the following programs and goals:

- Results Driven Accountability Initiative from the U. S. Department of Education
- Illinois Pathways
- 60 percent by 2025 (adults with post-secondary credentials)
- Adequate Yearly Progress Waiver
- Race to the Top
- New Illinois Learning Standards/Guidelines (Birth – Grade 12)
- Attendance, Truancy, Discipline, and Juvenile Justice data disaggregation

V. IN SUMMARY.....

The preceding recommendations were a result of eight months of discussion, deliberation and consensus by a large group of engaged individuals representing public agencies, Chicago Public Schools and community organizations. The overarching theme to the aforementioned recommendations is connection: connection between parents and the school, between the community and families, between state and local partners, and between students and their own education. Moving forward, the Task Force hopes that its contributions to this area will be taken into consideration by state and local partners as well as the communities they serve.

Though many specific recommendations have been put forth in the preceding sections of this document, the Task Force realizes that the onset of truancy and/or excessive absences is often one symptom of a larger set of crises or problems in a child's life. Recommended actions of this Task Force may very well have the benefit of addressing other issues within the Chicago Public Schools, such as student disciplinary issues, bullying, academic performance and student engagement. In such a way, recommendations from other commissions, councils, committees and task forces focused on other issues may also have the added benefit of reducing truancy and excessive absences in the city's student population.

Members of the Task Force stand ready to continue efforts in addressing truancy in Chicago Public Schools as well as any other district in Illinois. To that end, questions regarding the work of the Task Force or its recommendations can be sent to truancytaskforce@isbe.net.

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VII. APPENDICES

- Appendix A: House Joint Resolution 0001 of the 98th General Assembly
- Appendix B: Roster of Task Force Members
- Appendix C: Regular Task Force Meeting Dates
- Appendix D: Task Force Member Meeting Attendance Roster
- Appendix E: Meeting Agendas and Minutes
- Appendix F: Public Hearings Notice
- Appendix G: Statutory and Regulatory References

Appendix A

House Joint Resolution 0001 of the 98th General Assembly



HJ0001

LRB098 02917 NHT 32929 r

1 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, Nearly 32,000 kindergarten through 8th grade
3 students in City of Chicago School District 299 missed 4 weeks
4 or more of class in the 2010-2011 school year; and

5 WHEREAS, Absenteeism in the elementary grades is
6 particularly severe in African-American communities on the
7 south and west sides of Chicago, which are marked by gang
8 violence, unemployment, and poverty; and

9 WHEREAS, More than 20% of black elementary school students
10 missed at least 4 weeks of school in the 2010-2011 school year,
11 compared to 7% of whites and 8% of Hispanics; and

12 WHEREAS, Forty-two percent of kindergarten through 8th
13 grade students with a disability or impairment missed 4 weeks
14 of classes in the same school year, compared to 12% of students
15 without a disability; and

16 WHEREAS, Nineteen percent of kindergarteners were
17 officially listed as chronic truants because they accumulated 9
18 or more days of unexcused absences; therefore, be it

19 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
20 NINETY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, THE

1 SENATE CONCURRING HEREIN, that there is created the Truancy in
2 Chicago Public Schools Task Force, consisting of all of the
3 following members:

4 (1) The Governor or his or her designee;

5 (2) 1 member of the General Assembly, appointed by the
6 President of the Senate;

7 (3) 1 member of the General Assembly, appointed by the
8 Minority Leader of the Senate;

9 (4) 1 member of the General Assembly, appointed by the
10 Speaker of the House of Representatives;

11 (5) 1 member of the General Assembly, appointed by the
12 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives;

13 (6) 1 representative from the Department of Children
14 and Family Services, appointed by the Director of Children
15 and Family Services;

16 (7) 1 representative from the State Board of Education,
17 appointed by the Chairperson of the State Board of
18 Education;

19 (8) 1 representative from the Board of Higher
20 Education, appointed by the Chairperson of the Board of
21 Higher Education;

22 (9) 1 representative from the Department of Human
23 Services, appointed by the Secretary of Human Services;

24 (10) 1 representative from the Department of
25 Corrections, appointed by the Director of Corrections;

26 (11) 1 representative from the Department of Juvenile

1 Justice, appointed by the Director of Juvenile Justice;

2 (12) 1 representative from the Chicago Police
3 Department, appointed by the Superintendent of Police;

4 (13) the Mayor of the City of Chicago or his or her
5 designee;

6 (14) the Chief Executive Officer of City of Chicago
7 School District 299 or his or her designee;

8 (15) 1 representative from an authority on housing in
9 the City of Chicago, appointed by the head of that
10 authority;

11 (16) 1 representative from a professional teachers'
12 organization representing teachers in City of Chicago
13 School District 299, appointed by the head of that
14 organization;

15 (17) 1 representative from an organization that
16 provides the tools for each individual to overcome the root
17 causes of homelessness through a holistic, scalable model,
18 appointed by the head of that organization;

19 (18) 1 representative from a private, not-for-profit
20 organization whose mission is to stimulate and encourage
21 the growth of the area's economy and its ability to provide
22 for its people, appointed by the head of that organization;

23 (19) 1 representative from the Office of the Secretary
24 of State, appointed by the Secretary of State;

25 (20) 1 representative from an organization in the City
26 of Chicago dealing with children's disabilities,

1 impairments, and social emotional issues, appointed by the
2 head of that organization;

3 (21) 1 representative from a coalition for the homeless
4 in the City of Chicago, appointed by the head of that
5 organization;

6 (22) 1 representative from the Office of the Cook
7 County Sheriff, appointed by the Cook County Sheriff;

8 (23) 4 chiefs of City of Chicago School District 299
9 from different areas of the city, appointed by the Chief
10 Executive Office of City of Chicago School District 299;

11 (24) 4 public members, including a representative of a
12 community-based organization serving school-age children,
13 appointed by the Governor, and 3 public members
14 representing the interests of child welfare advocates,
15 education personnel, community-based organizations,
16 faith-based institutions, criminal justice advocates,
17 parents and guardians, and students (regardless of their
18 ability, disability, advanced ability, or twice
19 exceptionality), appointed by the Governor;

20 (25) 1 member from an organization representing
21 charter schools, appointed by the head of that
22 organization; and

23 (26) 1 representative of each public university in this
24 State, appointed by the president of each of those
25 universities; and be it further

1 RESOLVED, That the task force shall meet initially at the
2 call of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the
3 President of the Senate and that members of the task force
4 shall select a chairperson at the initial meeting and shall
5 thereafter meet at the call of the chairperson; and be it
6 further

7 RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education shall provide
8 staff and administrative support to the Task Force; and be it
9 further

10 RESOLVED, That the members of the Task Force shall be
11 reimbursed for their travel expenses from appropriations to the
12 State Board of Education available for that purpose and subject
13 to the rules of the appropriate travel control board; and be it
14 further

15 RESOLVED, That the Task Force shall examine issues and make
16 recommendations related to current State Board of Education and
17 City of Chicago School District 299 policies regarding truancy
18 and excessive absences; and be it further

19 RESOLVED, That the Task Force shall identify different
20 strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of
21 Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy
22 and excessive absences epidemic in the City of Chicago, promote

1 ongoing professional development to equip school personnel
2 with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing
3 factors to truancy and excessive absences, and support
4 community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing
5 efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive
6 social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in
7 school and in their communities; and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That the Task Force shall hold public hearings in
9 the City of Chicago and shall report its findings to the
10 General Assembly on or before December 31, 2013; and be it
11 further

12 RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be
13 delivered to the Governor, the Director of Children and Family
14 Services, the Chairperson of the State Board of Education, the
15 Chairperson of the Board of Higher Education, the Secretary of
16 Human Services, the Director of Corrections, the Director of
17 Juvenile Justice, the Superintendent of the Chicago Police
18 Department, the Mayor of the City of Chicago, the Chief
19 Executive Officer of City of Chicago School District 299, the
20 Secretary of State, the Cook County Sheriff, and the president
21 of each public university in this State.

Appendix B

Roster of Task Force Members



Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force Appointment Roster

Ana Alvarado
Chicago Public Schools

Jeff Aranowski
Illinois State Board of Education

Christine Boyd
Illinois Department of Corrections

Andrew Broy
Illinois Network of Charter Schools

Senator Jacqueline Collins
Illinois State Senator

Aarti Dhupelia
Chicago Public Schools

Sergeant Kevin Fahey
Chicago Police Department

Bobbie Gregg (*Replaced 2/27/14*)
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Annette Gurley (*Replaced 1/21/14*)
Chicago Public Schools

Mary C. Howard, Ph.D. LCPC
Chicago Housing Authority

Madelyn James (*Appointed 3/14/14*)
VOICES for Chicago Children

Jim Kestner
Eastern Illinois University

Crystal Laura
Chicago State University

Robert Lee
Illinois State University

LaTanya McDade
Chicago Public Schools

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Enlace Chicago

Jennifer Berne
Northern Illinois University

Juliet Bromer
Erikson Institute

Kirsten Carroll (*Resigned 1/29/14*)
The Commercial Club of Chicago

Senator Michael Connelly
Illinois State Senator

Andrea Evans
University of Illinois at Chicago

Rick Gravatt (*Resigned 5/30/14*)
Department of Juvenile Justice

Neha Gupta-Patel (*Replaced 3/31/14*)
Chicago Public Schools

Sarah Hains (*Appointed 3/31/14*)
Chicago Teachers Union

Laurene Heybach
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

Leslie Juby
Governor's Designee

Laura Kieran (*Resigned May 2014*)
Western Illinois University

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Illinois State Representative

Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Governors State University

Melissa Mitchell
Federation for Community Schools



Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force Appointment Roster

Heidi Mueller (*Resigned 4/18/14*)
Department of Human Services

Kareem Pender
Chicago Urban League

Representative Sandi Pihos
Illinois State Representative

Theresa Plascencia
Chicago Public Schools

Jackie Price
Illinois Secretary of State

Neli Vazquez Rowland
A Safe Haven Foundation

Paul Sarvela
Southern Illinois University

Michael Seelig (*Appointed 1/21/14*)
Chicago Public Schools

Barbara Sherry
Northeastern Illinois University

Arthur Sutton
Illinois Board of Higher Education

Elizabeth Swanson (*Appointed 2/10/14*)
City of Chicago Mayor's Office

Antoinette P. Taylor
Exceptional Needs Consultant

Maria Trejo
Elev8 Program, Ames Middle School (Chicago)

Sheila Venson (*Resigned 1/31/14*)
Youth Connection Charter School

Kevin Walsh (*Appointed 2/27/14*)
Department of Children and Family Services

Dana Wright (*Appointed 2/4/14*)
Cook County Sheriff's Department

Jack Wuest
Alternative Schools Network

Appendix C

Regular Task Force Meeting Dates



Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force
Regular Meeting Dates

January 31, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

March 31, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

May 12, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

July 14, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

February 28, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

April 28, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 9-040
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

June 19, 2014 (10:00 a.m.)

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Alzina Building
100 N. First Street, Third Floor Conference Room
Springfield, Illinois 62777

Teleconferencing was available for all meetings.

Appendix D

Task Force Member Meeting Attendance Roster

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force Attendance Roster

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street
Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building
100 North First Street
V-Tel Room, Third Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62777

Task Force Member	12/06/13	01/31/14	02/28/14	03/31/14	04/28/14	05/12/14	06/19/14	07/14/14
Anna Alvarado <i>Chief of Schools, O'Hare Network Chicago Public Schools</i>	PC	NP	NP	NP	NP	PC	NP	NP
Fanny Diego Alvarez <i>Director of Community Schools Enlace Chicago</i>	PP	PC	PC	PC	PC	PP	PC	PP
Jeff Aranowski <i>Division Supervisor, Legal Illinois State Board of Education</i>	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Jennifer Berne <i>Chair, Department of Literacy Education Northern Illinois University</i>	PC	PC	NP	PC	PC	PC	PP	PP
Christine Boyd <i>Administrator of Adult Education and Vocational Services Illinois Department of Corrections</i>	NP	PS	NP	PS	PP	NP	NP	NP

Juliet Bromer <i>Assistant Research Scientist Erikson Institute</i>	PCX	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Andrew Broy <i>President Illinois Network of Charter Schools</i>	PCX	PC	NP	PCX	PCX	PCX	PCX	PCX
Kirsten Carroll - Resigned 1/29/14 <i>Vice President, Policy Civic Committee, The Commercial Club of Chicago</i>	PP							
Senator Jacqueline Collins <i>Illinois State Senator</i>	NP	PP	NP	PC	PC	NP	PP	NP
Senator Michael Connelly <i>Illinois State Senator</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Aarti Dhupelia <i>Chief Officer College and Career Success Chicago Public Schools</i>	PC	PC	PC	NP	PC	PC	PC	PC
Andrea E. Evans <i>College of Education University of Illinois at Chicago</i>	PC	PC	NP	PC	PP	NP	PP	NP
Sergeant Kevin Fahey <i>Youth Investigations Chicago Police Department</i>	PC	PC	PC	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Rick Gravatt - Resigned 5/30/14 <i>Acting School District Superintendent</i>	PC	PC	PC	NP	PP	PC		

<i>Department of Juvenile Justice</i>								
Bobbie Gregg - Resigned <i>2/27/14*</i> <i>Acting Administrator, Bureau of Operations</i> <i>Illinois Dept of Children & Family Services *Named Acting DCFS Director, replaced by Kevin Walsh</i>	PC	PC						
Neha Gupta-Patel - Replaced <i>3/31/14*</i> <i>Kenwood Academy, Spanish Teacher</i> <i>Chicago Public Schools</i> <i>*Replaced by Sarah Hains</i>	NP	NP	NP					
Annette Gurley - Replaced <i>1/21/14*</i> <i>Chief Officer, Office of Teaching and Learning</i> <i>Chicago Public Schools</i> <i>*Replaced by Michael Seelig</i>	PCX							
Sarah Hains - Appointed <i>3/31/14</i> <i>Chicago Teachers Union</i>					PC	PC	PC	PC
Mary C. Howard <i>Executive Vice President, Resident Services</i> <i>Chicago Housing Authority</i>	PC	NP	PP	NP	PCX	PPX	PCX	PC
Laurene Heybach <i>Director of the Law Project</i> <i>Chicago Coalition for the Homeless</i>	PC	PC	PCX	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC

Madelyn James - Appointed 3/4/14 <i>VOICES for Illinois Children</i>				PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Leslie Juby <i>School Success Task Force Governor's Designee</i>	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Jim Kestner <i>Chair, Department of Student Teaching and Clinical Experiences Eastern Illinois University</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Laura Kieran * <i>Assistant Professor Curriculum and Instruction Department Western Illinois University *Indicated on 1/30/14 she would be moving to Iowa (Drake U.) in June</i>	PP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Crystal Laura <i>Assistant Professor Department of Doctoral Studies College of Education Chicago State University</i>	PC	PP	PP	PC	PP	PP	NP	PP
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia <i>Illinois State Representative</i>	PP	PC	PC	PP	PC	PC	PC	PC
Robert Lee <i>Executive Director Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline™ College of Education Illinois State University</i>	PS	PCX	PC	NP	PP	NP	PP	NP

Shaalein Carroll Lopez <i>Assistant Professor School Psychology Program Coordinator Division of Psychology and Counseling Governors State University</i>	PC	PC	PP	NP	NP	PP	NP	NP
LaTanya McDade <i>Chief of Schools, Skyway Network Chicago Public Schools</i>	PC	NP	PC	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Melissa Mitchell <i>Federation for Community Schools</i>	PC	NP	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Heidi Mueller - Resigned 4/18/14* <i>Department of Human Services *Moved to Department of Corrections</i>	PC	PC	NP	PC	PC			
Kareem Pender <i>Senior Director Human Capital and Education Programs Chicago Urban League</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Representative Sandi Pihos <i>Illinois State Representative</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Theresa Plascencia <i>Chief of Schools, West Side Network Chicago Public Schools</i>	PC	NP	NP	NP	PC	NP	NP	NP
Jackie Price <i>Director, Budget & Fiscal Management Illinois Secretary of State</i>	PS	PS	PS	PS	PS	PS	NP	PCX

Neli Vazquez Rowland <i>President</i> <i>A Safe Haven Foundation</i>	NP	PC	PP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Paul Sarvela <i>Vice President for Academic Affairs</i> <i>Southern Illinois University</i>	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
Michael Seelig- Appointed 1/21/14 <i>Executive Director of Student Support and Engagement</i> <i>Chicago Public Schools</i>		PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Barbara Sherry Executive Director Student Success and Retention Northeastern Illinois University	PC	PC	PP	PP	NP	PP	NP	NP
Arthur Sutton <i>Deputy Director for Diversity and Outreach</i> <i>Illinois Board of Higher Education</i>	NP	PS	PS	NP	PS	PS	PSX	PS
Elizabeth Swanson - Appointed 2/10/14 Mayor's Chief Advisor on Education and Youth Policy City of Chicago			PC	NP	PCX	NP	NP	NP
Antoinette P. Taylor <i>Exceptional Needs Consultant</i>	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
Maria Trejo <i>Elev8 Program</i> <i>Ames Middle School</i>	PC	PP	PP	PC	PP	PP	NP	PC

Sheila Venson - Resigned <i>1/31/14</i> <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Youth Connection Charter</i> <i>Schools</i>	NP							
Kevin Walsh - Appointed <i>2/27/14</i> <i>Department of Children and</i> <i>Family</i> <i>Services</i>			PC	PC	PC	PC	NP	PC
Dana R. Wright - Appointed <i>2/4/14</i> <i>First Deputy Chief of Police</i> <i>Cook County Sheriff's Police</i> <i>Department</i>			PC	PC	PCX	PCX	PCX	PCX
Jack Wuest <i>Alternative Schools Network</i>	PC	PC	PC	PC	NP	PC	NP	PC

Code:

PC -Present in Chicago

PS – Present in Springfield

PP – Present via telephone

NP – Not Present

X - Proxy

Appendix E

Meeting Agendas and Minutes

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda
December 6, 2013
10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street
Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building
100 North First Street
V-Tel Room, 3rd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62777

-
- | | |
|------------|---|
| 10:00 a.m. | Opening Remarks and Introduction of Task Force Members |
| 10:15 a.m. | Task Force Procedural Issues |
| | A. Open Meetings Act Requirements |
| | B. Ethics Requirements |
| 10:30 a.m. | Selection of Task Force Chairperson |
| 10:45 a.m. | Discussion of Need to Adopt Bylaws |
| 11:00 a.m. | Review and Detailed Discussion of House Joint Resolution 0001 |
| 11:30 a.m. | Establish Goals, Timelines and Subcommittees |
| 12:00 p.m. | Public Comment |
| 12:30 p.m. | General Discussion on Other Topics by Task Force Members |
| 1:00 p.m. | Adjourn |

*All times are approximate and are for planning purposes only. Each agenda item will commence upon conclusion of the previous item.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force Meeting

December 6, 2013

Chicago Attendees

Ana Alvarado
Jeff Aranowski
Jennifer Berne
Tonya Bibbs (for Juliet Bromer)
Adam Rogalski (for Andrew Broy)
Aarti Dhupelia
Andrea Evans
Kevin Fahey
Rick Gravatt
Bobbie Gregg
Lynda Williams (for Annette Gurley)
Shaalein Carroll Lopez

Mary Howard
Laurene Heybach
Leslie Juby
Crystal Laura
LaTanya McDade
Melissa Mitchell
Heidi Mueller
Theresa Plascencia
Barbara Sherry
Antoinette Taylor
Maria Trejo
Jack Wuest

Springfield Attendees

Robert Lee

Jackie Price

Phone Attendees

Kirsten Carroll
Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia
Fanny Diego Alvarez

Laura Kieran
Paul Sarvela

Members Absent

Christine Boyd
Sen. Jacqueline Collins
Sen. Michael Connelly
Neha Gupta-Patel
Jim Kestner

Kareem Pender
Rep. Sandi Pihos
Arthur Sutton
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Sheila Venson

The meeting was called to order by Jeff Aranowski, a task force member who is employed by the Illinois State Board of Education, at 10:10 a.m.

Introductions were made around the table in Chicago and Springfield and by those participating by telephone.

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia, participating via telephone, introduced her representative at the meeting, Pat Dal Santo, Superintendent of the Kane County Regional Office of Education. Representative Chapa LaVia expressed her gratitude to all task force participants and asked them to invite other professionals with expertise in matters related to truancy and absenteeism to contribute to the work of the task force.

Mr. Aranowski indicated the State Board would like to echo Representative's Chapa LaVia's comments and would like to thank everyone for participating.

Mr. Aranowski reminded task force members to complete their ethics verification statements and Open Meetings Act training.

Mr. Aranowski then asked for volunteers or nominees to chair the task force, and Antoinette Taylor, an Exceptional Needs Consultant who helped Representative Chapa LaVia draft the Resolution, volunteered her service.

Mr. Aranowski asked for a motion to accept Ms. Taylor's nomination as chairperson. Leslie Juby, the Governor's designee on the task force, so moved. A voice vote was called for which was unanimously affirming.

Mr. Aranowski forecast monthly meetings since the task force has a limited amount of time to reach its goals and also asserted the need for by-laws in a public assembly of this nature. Mr. Aranowski asked Ms. Taylor if she wished to adopt by-laws and she agreed. Mr. Aranowski asked for discussion related to meeting by-laws and there was none. He then asked for volunteers to draft meeting by-laws. Heidi Mueller of the Department of Human Services volunteered to work with Mr. Aranowski on drafting by-laws for the task force.

Mr. Aranowski asked Ms. Taylor for background on the resolution. He also reminded everyone that the final report of the task force was due in twenty days, but that Representative Chapa LaVia had introduced another Resolution to extend the deadline to July 31, 2014.

Ms. Taylor noted the short span of time between now and the end of the month, and expressed her hope that the new Resolution would pass to extend the timeline. She advised that the task force work expeditiously and that the result of this effort be sustainable for all parties involved.

Ms. Taylor said the Resolution creating the task force occurred in the wake of a Chicago Tribune series entitled "An Empty-Desk Epidemic" which she described as very compelling as it examined all facets of truancy and absenteeism. Ms. Taylor added that the series informed officials that they must make sure the right systems are in place and that accountability must be shared by all professionals involved as well as the parents.

Ms. Taylor explained that embedded in this series was a concern about students with disabilities which was also a focus in the Resolution. On line 12, it states, "Forty-two percent of kindergarten through eighth grade students with a disability or impairment missed four weeks of classes in the same school year compared to 12% of students without a disability or impairment." She stated there is an obvious concern when any school is being missed by any child, but the rate for students with disabilities or impairments was so much more that Representative Chapa LaVia and she wanted to envelop this factor into the Resolution.

Ms. Taylor added that although she would be remiss if she didn't acknowledge that the combined issues of truancy and absenteeism also affect a large population of students of color, if there is to be forward movement toward the State's goal through the P-20 Council to increase the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025, the task force has to look at the entire community -people of color, people who may be disadvantaged for whatever reason, people who may not have the tools they need to advocate for themselves. Ms. Taylor explained further that everyone needs to be at the table, public

schools and charter schools, to come up with a plan to move programming and systems of support forward. When the deadline of July 31 is reached, Ms. Taylor expects the task force will be able to show the General Assembly cost-effective and sustainable methods for improving the lives of all our children and all our families across the city and the state and possible across the whole country.

Mr. Aranowski said one of the purposes of the task force is to review the policies of the Chicago Board of Education and ISBE and make recommendations either for legislative change or changes to truancy tracking rates or the allocation of funding to truancy efforts.

Melissa Mitchell of the Federation for Community Schools asked if the State has a consistent or statewide definition on absenteeism or truancy used by every district.

Mr. Aranowski explained that districts have the discretion to define an unexcused absence for their own use. He added that technically, according to the law, a student is truant if he or she misses any day or part of the day. There is also a formal definition within the law of chronic or habitual truancy which in 2011 was changed from 10% of the 180 day school year to 5% (unexcused absences totaling no more than nine days).

Ms. Mitchell asked about students whose absences may be excused by virtue of explanatory notes from parents or guardians and the possibility that excused absences could total a number of days that would create concern.

Mr. Aranowski said districts have the discretion to define what an unexcused absence is and that districts approach absences, such as those that accrue due to family vacations, in different ways.

Aarti Dhupelia of the Chicago Public Schools asked if the focus was going to be chronic truancy or if the scope could be expanded to include chronic absenteeism which she feels is a much broader issue, due in part to a lack of parental awareness of the importance of high attendance.

Ms. Taylor said we should approach all aspects of the issue and asked Melissa Mitchell to provide some details of a summer symposium at the University of Chicago that was sponsored by Ms. Mitchell's organization, the Federation for Community Schools, and attended by Representative Chapa LaVia and Ms. Taylor.

Ms. Mitchell explained the roles the Federation for Community Schools plays as an advocate for community school partnerships and a provider of learning experiences for community school practitioners. In August the Federation had asked Hedy Chang from Attendance Counts to address absenteeism issues. Ms. Mitchell explained that "truancy is one thing but when you have a kindergartner not getting to school, that's another thing. We have to look at the underlying causes" (transportation, failure to set an alarm, etc.). The purpose of the symposium was to dissect absenteeism data in order to understand the myriad causes, the potential outcomes, and the support that is necessary for struggling families.

Ms. Mitchell was asked to contact Attendance Counts for permission to share the symposium materials with the task force. Ms. Taylor was particularly interested in reconciling that

organization's probe into truancy and absenteeism data with a report card issued by the Family and Youth Community Engagement Committee within the P-20 Council that found some schools' attendance data masked the real truancy figures: "We saw their attendance might be at 93%, but their truancy was at 46%; nevertheless, they were applauding their high attendance rate."

Laurene Heybach of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless asked if the ISBE website could feature all related documents to the truancy task force, all relevant CPS policies, ISBE policies, the Chicago Tribune series, the Attendance Counts training materials, etc. could all be in one place. Mr. Aranowski informed the task force that a special page had been created the previous day on the ISBE website that already featured certain information relative to the task force such as the meeting agenda and task force members' names and would be expanded to include all relevant materials.

Aarti Dhupelia of the Chicago Public Schools said CPS is very excited about the formation of the task force and that the CEO has made it a priority to tackle their absenteeism challenges by developing new strategies. There has been a lot of research that shows that student attendance is more of a predictor of student success than test scores. Ms. Dhupelia indicated further that CPS see this as an "It takes a village issue," as they know they cannot tackle this alone. She further suggested the task force read a report that was recently issued documenting New York City's efforts to stem chronic absenteeism ("Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism").

Ms. Taylor said it was important to point out that the Chicago Tribune series captured school year 2010-2011, and many people who are now in leadership positions at CPS were not in those positions then, but they have indicated their commitment to the work of the task force.

Tonya Bibbs of the Erikson Institute said we need to separate numbers about expulsions and suspensions from attendance data. Ms. Taylor referred to the Chicago Tribune article again to support Ms. Bibbs' statements and referred to the disproportionality of students of color when it comes to suspensions and expulsions.

Heidi Mueller of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission suggested that the task force also focus on the barriers that exist for children who have been involved in the juvenile justice system and the problems they face when it is time to re-enroll in school.

Ms. Taylor suggested that in order to address all issues, committees may need to be formed to report back to the larger group.

Ms. Juby, the governor's designee, said the School Success Task Force is working on a report about suspensions and expulsions on the high school level that will likely be of interest to members of the truancy task force.

Ms. Heybach informed the task force of another source of information related to truancy issues, a report by VOYCE (Voices of Youth in Chicago Education) in Albany Park that highlighted truancy's deleterious effects on school budgets and truant's well-being especially since many

feel excluded and unwelcome. She also addressed the problems faced by children, homeless and otherwise, and the barriers they face in school enrollment.

Mr. Aranowski posed a question to CPS regarding their adoption of policies which de-emphasize exclusionary policies and focus on restorative justice.

Aarti Dhupelia said CPS has made many changes including reducing the number of days for suspension for disciplinary infractions, reducing the types of infractions, excluding pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students from consideration for suspension, changing the number of infractions that precipitate disciplinary action, and pushing restorative justice practices. Ms. Dhupelia stated further that CPS is establishing foundational practices for a positive climate of cultural acceptance and uniform standards from both a policy standpoint and a practice standpoint.

Rick Gravatt of the Department of Juvenile Justice explained that the students in the care of his agency miss school through no fault of their own but because of staffing shortages, due in part to a restrictive hiring process. He is interested in some administrative or legislative relief so he can fill teacher vacancies and provide an education to all incarcerated youth.

Ms. Taylor suggested charter schools be included in any task force discussions, considerations, and solutions as they are the academic service providers for many Chicago school children.

Ms. Heybach of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless said there are some problems particular to charter schools which she thinks should be on the table as well: school fees, timeliness of enrollment, harsher discipline, and low special education population. "If we look broadly at the things that keep kids out of schools," Ms. Heybach explained, "we have to look at charters because they are Chicago Public Schools also."

In reference to charter schools, Ms. Taylor spoke about the accountability of charter schools and referred to the fact that CPS is the local educational agency (LEA) for any charter school in District 299. She indicated also that many charter schools are part of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) and expressed the belief that any concerns we have about the services available to all children through charter schools can be handled through these entities.

Adam Rogalski, INCS Director of Policy and Advocacy Leadership, said he looked forward to being a resource for the people on the task force.

Andrea Evans of the University of Illinois at Chicago explained she is starting a research project on chronic elementary absenteeism, a growing challenge for schools, and had two concerns: how you count student absences when districts have different policies about what constitutes an excused absence (in the case of family vacations and other non-medical reasons) and whether schools are welcoming environments or not.

Ms. Taylor said we might adopt our own definition of truancy and absenteeism and determine what should be a policy for the State. She also reflected on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the effect of absenteeism and truancy on student

performance on assessments related to the new learning challenges. Ms. Taylor added that unaddressed truancy issues could impact funding for district programs.

Ms. Taylor explained that the Resolution calls for public hearings. The task force discussed particular items for consideration in planning for public meetings such as outreach to specific target groups, possible locations, meeting protocols, survey documents, attendee confidentiality, and meeting timelines. Ms. Juby, the governor's designee, had organized community meetings as part of her involvement in the School Success Task Force, so she was asked to prepare a blueprint for public hearings covering all considerations from audience and outreach to locations and agendas. Dr. Shaalein Carroll Lopez from Governor's State University volunteered her assistance.

Ms. Taylor said it is a good thing we have access to both the Illinois State Board of Education and the Chicago Board of Education because the task force has to look at current policies and the implementation of the policies. When policies are created, she explained, there is an expectation for certain outcomes; the task force has to see if these expectations are being met with regard to attendance issues.

Jack Wuest of the Alternative Schools Network commented that there have been successful independent programs to address truancy which could inspire solutions, but cautioned that these programs have seen losses in funding. Two in particular were a regional safe schools program that worked with suspended or expelled students and a truant alternative education program which both brought about a decrease in dropout rates.

Barbara Sherry of Northeastern Illinois University is a former public defender for Cook County and said there is a connection between absenteeism, truancy, and incarceration, and there are additional effects on communities and their institutions. She explained that 73% of the university's students are CPS graduates and those with attendance issues achieve less, have difficulty selecting a major, and take a much longer time to graduate than do students who attend classes.

Mr. Aranowski recommended that ISBE staff do a report on the impact of absenteeism and funding issues and asked CPS to do the same. He also indicated that all items in the Resolution have to be addressed including professional development to educators and community organizations.

Mr. Aranowski reminded people that they can't do blanket email or committee emails because of the protocols set forth in the Open Meetings Act. Emails can be sent to the chairperson, but decisions cannot be made in emails. One cannot email members of a committee but can email a chair who can then send it out.

Mr. Aranowski was asked what constitutes a quorum for the task force. He indicated that 22 of 43 task force members had to be present for a meeting.

Mr. Aranowski also said official business cannot be conducted without notice to the public.

Ms. Juby said if you have a call in number and agenda posted 48 hours before, you have met the standard.

Information was passed out related to Open Meetings Act training.

Ms. Heybach suggested that we seek out a student helper from one of the local universities to assist with task force business. A student from a legislative law class might want to help. Her office has relationships with John Marshall Law School and Loyola University.

It was agreed that during the January meeting, the following items would be available and subject to discussion:

- Public hearing template
- Committees
- By-law draft
- Focus of public hearings

Ms. Taylor asked members of the public for comment, but there was no response. There were additionally no items presented for general discussion.

Ms. Taylor entertained a motion to adjourn at 11:45 a.m. The motion was seconded.

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Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

January 31, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 2-025

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the December 6, 2013 Meeting
 - IV. Discussion and Adoption of Rules of Order
 - V. Members' Introductions: Why Are We Here?
 - VI. Presentations of Current Truancy Provisions, Processes, and Issues
 - A. Illinois State Board of Education
 - B. Chicago Public Schools
 - VII. Task Force Committees
 - A. Creation of Committees
 - B. Assignment of Members to Committees
 - VIII. New Business and Open Discussion
 - IX. Public Participation
 - X. Future Meeting Dates
 - XI. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



January 31, 2014 Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chairperson Taylor called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Representative Chapa LaVia welcomed the members of the task force and thanked them for the commitment of their time and expertise to a problem affecting the education of children in Chicago and throughout the entire state.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

The following task force members were present for the meeting:

Chicago

Fanny Diego Alvarez

Jennifer Berne

Andrew Broy

Aarti Dhupelia

Kevin Fahey

Bobbie Gregg

Leslie Juby

Shaalein Carroll Lopez

Neli Vazquez Rowland

Barbara Sherry

Jack Wuest

Jeff Aranowski

Juliet Bromer

Linda Chapa LaVia

Andrea Evans

Rick Gravatt

Laurene Heybach

Robert Lee (Dakota Pawlicki)

Heidi Mueller

Michael Seelig

Antoinette Taylor

Springfield

Christine Boyd

Arthur Sutton

Jackie Price

Telephone

Jacqueline Collins

Paul Sarvela

Crystal Laura

Maria Trejo

Not Present

Anna Alvarado

Neha Gupta-Patel

Jim Kestner

LaTanya McDade

Kareem Pender

Theresa Plascencia

Michael Connelly

Mary C. Howard

Laura Kieran

Melissa Mitchell

Sandi Pihos

Withdrew from Task Force

Kirsten Carroll

Sheila Venson

III. Approval of Minutes from the December 6, 2013 Meeting

Chairperson Taylor asked for a review of the minutes. Mr. Aranowski motioned to approve minutes. His motion was seconded by Ms. Dhupelia.

IV. Discussion and Adoption of Rules of Order

Mr. Aranowski gave some context to the rules of order which Heidi Mueller and he drafted. He said the task force is on a sliding scale for the quorum right now since two members submitted resignations and another member intends to do so soon due to a job change out of state. He added that the mayor of Chicago and the sheriff of Cook County still had not made appointments to the task force. The quorum now stands at twenty-one, consistent with the directive within the bylaws for a simple majority to be present in order for the conduct of business to occur. He stated further that proxy votes were not going to be permitted under the proposed rules of order, a standard parliamentary rule of procedure.

Rules of order were reviewed by members. There were no comments or questions.

A motion was made to adopt, and then seconded. Rules of order were adopted.

V. Members' Introductions: Why Are We Here?

Chairperson Taylor asked that all task force members provide some information about themselves since they were all appointed to the task force by virtue of their backgrounds, experience, and knowledge relative to the issues of truancy and absenteeism. These introductions served to reveal that members of the task force are members of the Illinois State Legislature or hold leadership positions in a number of governmental agencies, institutions of higher learning, community-based organizations, child welfare advocacy groups, law enforcement, and the Chicago Public Schools.

VI. Presentations of Current Truancy Provisions, Processes, and Issues

Mr. Aranowski provided the members of the task force with copies of two Illinois statutes and a state regulation related to school attendance:

- Compulsory Attendance 105 ILCS 5/26
- Chronic Truants and the CPS Office of Chronic Adjudication 105 ILCS 5/34-4.5
- Absenteeism and Truancy Policies 23 Illinois Administrative Code 1.290

Compulsory Attendance (105 ILCS 5/26)

He explained that some terms related to truancy and absenteeism are already defined in statute. He began with the handout on compulsory attendance and explained it formed the foundation for why kids have to be in school every single day. Right now compulsory attendance applies if you are between the ages of 7 and 17; starting next school year (2014-2015), that is dropping to age 6.

Compulsory attendance applies to every single child in the state except for children who fall into the following six categories of exception:

1. A child attending a private or parochial school
2. A child who is physically or mentally unable to attend school (becoming less of an issue due to IDEA)
3. A child who is employed in accordance with the provisions of laws regulating child labor
4. Any child over 12 and under 14 who is enrolled in confirmation classes
5. A child whose school day coincides with a day of religious observance
6. A child 16 or older who submits evidence of lawful employment or is enrolled in a graduation incentives program or an alternative learning opportunities program.

A question was raised about home-schooling and Mr. Aranowski explained there is no reference to home-schooling in state law or regulation, but that there was an Illinois Supreme Court case in the 1950s called *People v. Levison* in which the Supreme Court said home-schooling is another form of private schooling.

The subject of home schooling prompted several other questions, mostly about the validity of a parent's claim to be home schooling a child when the school district considers the child to be truant. Mr. Aranowski explained that home schooling falls into a gray area in Illinois because there are limitations to what you can and cannot ask parents or compel them to produce due to parents' privacy rights. If a parent professes to be home schooling his or her child, the truancy investigation stops. He did add, however, there are actually very few parents in the state who home school their children.

Mr. Aranowski pointed out that compulsory attendance applies to children above and below the compulsory ages of attendance if they enrolled in school and are not present. This applies to students younger than seven (six next school year) years old and older than seventeen (Section 26-2(a) of the compulsory attendance statute).

Section 26-2(a) of the compulsory attendance statute stipulates that a child is truant who is absent without a *valid cause* for any portion of the school day. *Valid cause* is defined as *illness, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, family emergency*, and other situations that are subject to interpretation as they are described as *situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the board of education in each district, or such other circumstances which cause reasonable concern for the health and safety of the student*.

A chronic or habitual truant is one who has missed nine days of attendance in the last 180 days or 5% of school days. This percentage was just recently revised downward from 10%.

Since many of the districts in Illinois subscribe to the Illinois Association of School Boards model template, they generally share a consistent definition of these terms.

Absenteeism and Truancy Policies (23 IAC 1.290)

Mr. Aranowski then referred to Section 26-13 which states the affirmative obligation of a district to have a policy on absenteeism and truancy policies and the need for the State Board of Education to provide some regulatory provisions for districts. These regulatory provisions were identified in the Absenteeism and Truancy Policies regulation from the Illinois Administrative Code (23 IAC 1.290) which specifies that districts must have the following components in their policy:

- a *valid cause* definition which aligns with Section 26-2(a) of the compulsory attendance statute,
- a description of the diagnostic procedures used to determine the cause of a student's absence, and
- the supportive services to be made available to truant students.

Chronic Truants and the CPS Office of Chronic Adjudication (105 ILCS 5/34-4.5)

School Code Article 34-4.5 specifically creates the CPS Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication and explains the process for adjudication including notices, hearing process, penalties, etc.

Andrea Evans pointed out that although statutes were written for unexcused absences, excused absences require additional scrutiny. She added that there is a cumulative effect when there is a loss of attendance for any reason. Districts make a determination about what constitutes an excused absence and a phone call from a parent does not necessarily rise to the level of an excused absence. Chairperson Taylor asserted the need to engage parents so they understand an absence is not okay if it is called in unless it is for a valid reason and reminded the task force of the mission to heed the president's call to have 60% of our students college ready by 2025.

In response to a statement that parents keep children home because of personal issues faced by the family, Ms. Dhupelia explained that CPS' Family Support Services is creating an online resource of network supports such as the nearest healthcare clinic, the closest social worker, domestic violence counselors, a nearby dentist, etc. to help parents tackle whatever their challenge is that affects their child's attendance.

Juliet Bromer added that schools need to be welcoming environments for parents and suggested professional development be provided to school staffs to communicate more effectively with parents. Rene Heybach cited the transportation challenges faced by homeless students especially with the use of the Ventra payment system as well as the difficulties homeless people have obtaining and paying for sufficient identification to register their children.

Truants' Alternative and Optional Program (TAOEP)

Sally Veach of ISBE's Special Education Services division was present to explain TAOEP, which was created in the 1980s to serve students with attendance problems, including dropouts, up until the age of 21. There are two types of programs:

- Truancy prevention and intervention programs which integrate resources within the school and community to keep students enrolled in their regular school placement
- Optional education programs which serve as the regular school attendance and offer modified educational programs and services to help the students stay in school.

In FY 2012, there were 21,475 students served. Of this number 79% were served in intervention/supplemental programs and 21% were served in optional education programs.

TAOEP divides the students who are served into four categories and the following percentages show the students served by category:

- 42% were truant
- 33% were chronic dropouts
- 17% were potential dropouts
- 8% were retrieved dropouts

TAOEP funding has decreased considerably in recent years. The highest amount of funding recently available was in 2009 when over \$20,000,000 was available in the state budget. This year, there was \$11,500,000 available, a 42.5% decrease in funding which has resulted in fewer students served.

The funding is awarded on a competitive basis except for CPS which receives 26.8% of TAOEP funding as part of their block grant for FY14 (\$3,082,000).

Public school districts, charter schools, community colleges, regional offices of education, vocational schools, and public university lab schools can apply for TAOEP funds. The request for funds is always higher than the funding available. Applicants submit an RFP and the first consideration of the application is based on the need within the service area, the ability of the program to identify and serve targeted students, the achievability of objectives and activities to improve student outcomes, cost effectiveness, evaluation strategies, and the use of strategies not routinely offered by regular school programs. In order to continue receiving funding in the course of the three year cycle, participating schools must submit mid-year reports indicating their progress on and fidelity to their original proposal.

For this year there are 73 grantees, of which 28 are school districts (including CPS), 30 are regional offices of education, and six are community colleges. Last year CPS served almost 2,000 students, and they are currently in their second year of their TAOEP grant at three re-engagement centers in high need communities. The other major local grantee is the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) which serves about 500 students in ten optional education programs. Together, CPS and CCC receive approximately 40% of TAOEP grant funds. Each year, there is a statistical report available on line at the ISBE website.

<http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/taoep.htm>

Mr. Aranowski said he would provide enrollment and truancy data at the next meeting for the state and for CPS.

Ms. Veach's TAOEP information prompted questions about the success of program participants, to which she responded that programs are unique to the needs of the educational entities in each area. Some

programs are optional educational programs, some target elementary students, others target middle school students, some focus on chronic truants, and some focus on potential dropouts. They serve different groups, all ages, all situations, some pre-dropout, some dropout, some dropout prevention, etc. There is no such thing as a typical program.

Ms. Veach said Chicago's three re-engagement centers are run by CPS in conjunction with neighborhood organizations because they found that young people who drop out of school are more likely to go to the community organization than to the school for help. There is a two week induction program where they get counseling, learn healthy habits, and are then placed in a setting appropriate for them.

Task force members commented on several issues in response to the information provided by Ms. Veach including tracking foster children's school attendance rates, the relationship between poverty and truancy, addressing reductions in funding for truancy programs by weighting different categories of assistance and awarding more money to districts that face the greatest challenges (in line with Sen. Andy Manar's Education Funding Advisory Committee recommendations), and the fact that missing students result in lowered funding for districts.

CPS - Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS)

Prior to comments by Ms. Amber Damerow, manager of the STLS programs for CPS; Michael Seelig, Executive Director of CPS' Student Support and Engagement Office; and Aarti Dhupelia, CPS Deputy Chief of Staff, Fanny Diego Alvarez addressed the crowded living conditions experienced by many Hispanic families who reside with large groups of relatives and their pride in refusing to acknowledge these difficult and burdensome living arrangements as anything akin to homelessness. The people in these situations, therefore, do not avail themselves of programs that would provide assistance.

Mr. Seelig offered several vignettes of families in crisis who face problems related to community/domestic violence, temporary living situations which hamper a student's ability to attend to personal needs, transportation hardships, lack of childcare, and adolescents who are forced from their homes over issues related to abusive situations or differences over sexual orientation. He explained that CPS currently has about 18,000 students in temporary living situations and expects this number to go up to 20,000 by the end of the school year as this population grows by about 12% each year.

He explained that it their job is to mitigate the challenges these kids face on a daily basis and facilitate their access to a quality education. He explained further that there are so many issues impacting the parents who are doubling up with relatives, out of work, or fighting illness, they cannot do what they should for their kids; chaotic lives affect decisions.

CPS has a cost projection of \$7.4 million this year to help students in various stages of homelessness, of which \$6.8 million goes directly to the CTA to cover transportation costs for students (federal requirement) and parents of younger students who escort their children to school. Money comes from general district funding with \$800,000 provided via the McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Act through ISBE. The projection for next year is \$8.2 million due to increased CTA charges. Money set aside at the school level is for Ventra card management and security related costs (8%), uniforms, and fees. Many task force members expressed their surprise that one agency had to pay another agency such a large amount of money and wondered if there could be some inter-agency funding compromises.

Discussion was then focused on the fact that homeless people are not aware of the services available to them and how it is incumbent upon CPS staff to ask the right questions in order to determine the extent of a student's need. Professional development for CPS staff was discussed in order to increase staff awareness both of student needs and solutions. Mr. Seelig suggested reaching out to the universities to incorporate some of these ideas into teacher training programs. Ms. Damerow explained that agencies that help the homeless should guide people to her office since they identify and address all barriers for

children experiencing homelessness. Her office also does outreach, but she has only five full time workers and five part time workers, a group with high morale and a strong work ethic.

Ms. Dhupelia explained CPS is committed to developing new attendance strategies as a result of the task force's scrutiny of the truancy problem. Expectations include guidance for schools toward attendance improvement and truancy reduction in line with state expectations as well as the identification of common standards such as what defines an excused absence as well as definitions of key indicators.

With regard to valid causes for absence, Ms. Dhupelia explained, it is not enough if a parent calls in, and the principal has the flexibility to make a decision about whether an excuse is legitimate. Her explanation of CPS definitions demonstrated they are parallel to the state's definitions. Truant means a student is absent for no valid cause. Valid excuses include illness, death in the family, family emergency, special religious holiday, and case by case special circumstances. Truancy is absent without cause for one or more days. Although chronic truancy is still defined in their policy as being absent for 18 days without an excuse or 10% of the school year, with the state's change to 5%, she said they are operating under the assumption this is the policy; it just has not been written in yet but will be when policy is rewritten this year. She also said there is nothing currently in policy about chronic absences which is a huge gap given that there are far too many excused absences.

Ms. Dhupelia said CPS attendance policies may be expanded to include some system-wide changes to address attendance such as mandated attendance tracking for schools, central office school audits, auditing attendance tracking quality, developing strategies for improving attendance, and inter-agency cooperation. Schools below 95% attendance will be asked to produce an attendance plan that outlines specific strategies to address attendance improvement (counseling, social work supports, access to healthcare, etc.).

There are general mandates around baseline school requirements to protect the rights of students and families, such as those who are homeless. STLS liaisons have to be in place to ensure homeless students and their families are receiving the support they need: student counseling supports, family counseling supports, parent conferences, etc.

If students have stopped showing up and there is no transfer verification from a receiving school or district, they can be removed from rolls if their whereabouts cannot be determined after calling all numbers, sending letters to the last known address, and conducting home visits and not getting a response from all these efforts.

Rep. Chapa LaVia asked about transcript transfers to the Department of Juvenile Justice when they contain IEPs. She said the money CPS gets doesn't transfer when a student enters juvenile detention and that there is lack of communication between agencies. It costs \$72,000 for a child in juvenile detention, so she suggested there needs to be more communication between agencies.

A common theme in the discussions about student transfers, juvenile detention, and chronic truancy centered on the need for better tracking of students. Some are registered at two or more schools with slight variations to their names, some cannot be found after transferring, some are chronically truant, and some end up in detention facilities.

Rep. Chapa LaVia spoke about the Longitudinal Data System being developed by ISBE, which should help in tracking kids within and outside districts when it is fully deployed. Some students could have duplicate numbers and/or multiple registrations so something permanent is needed to identify children. She also suggested that the Secretary of State's office could help in the dissemination of information.

VII. Task Force Committees

Chairperson Taylor said the committee ideas came from the Chicago Tribune series and December meeting discussion and reiterated the need to differentiate about the reasons kids miss school. She cited the newspaper series' data as it breaks down by race and disabilities.

The overall rate of truancy in the Chicago Public Schools is 12.9%, but among Black students (who comprise 39.8% of students), 20.4% missed at least four weeks of school. Students with disabilities miss school in disproportionate numbers to the general school population: 42.2% of students with emotional disorders; 21.7% of those with cognitive impairments, sensory dysfunctioning, or autism; and 15.4% of students with learning disabilities have all missed four or more weeks of school. Ms. Taylor cautioned that these student-with-disability absences do not include students who have 504 plans as they have disabilities that do not impede learning but their illness or condition may, nevertheless, cause time away from school, i.e., students with diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, etc. There are also more chronic truants in kindergarten through second grade than in all other elementary grades.

Ms. Taylor announced that according to suggestions of task force members, three committees would be formed to allow for a more focused approach to the mission of the task force:

- Public Hearing Committee – will organize three public hearings in the south, west, and central portions of the city in March and April, including one to be held on a Saturday and will create a template to provide a framework for planning and executing the meetings.
- Best Practice Committee – will read and extract salient information from a number of truancy studies which had been recommended for their relevancy and report to the task force.
- Report Writing Committee – will provide an executive summary for the legislature and make recommendations to address the truancy problem that plagues CPS and other large districts across the state.

General discussion ensued around the following topics: organization of information, categorization of pertinent issues, determination of priorities, decisions about what constitutes an appropriate resource, and harnessing the knowledge of task force members by virtue of their positions and experience.

In reference to the form “The Focus on Truancy and Excessive Absenteeism” which task force members were asked to complete, Shaalein Carroll Lopez suggested organizing task force priorities into “buckets.” Ms. Dhupelia suggested the buckets could focus on things such as policy determination, inter-agency collaboration, student services at the school level, effective parenting, etc.

Andrea Evans suggested dividing all topics into three categories of orientation:

- school (policy, climate, student/teacher relations),
- family (extenuating circumstances),
- student (social/emotional, academic)

Ms. Evans stated that she has done some work in this area and would send a template for consideration and review.

VIII. New Business and Open Discussion

There were no additional ideas presented for discussion.

IX. Public Participation

Two college students who came to observe introduced themselves to the task force.

X. Future Meeting Dates

- February 28, 2014
- March 31, 2014

- April 28, 2014
- May 12, 2014
- June 19, 2014
- July 14, 2014

XI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:21 p.m.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda
February 28, 2014
10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street
Room 2-025
Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street
V-Tel Room, Third Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the January 31, 2014 Meeting
 - IV. Miguel del Valle - Chairman of the Illinois P-20 Council and Illinois Commerce Commission Commissioner
 - V. School to Prison Pipeline
 - VI. The Focus on Truancy and Excessive Absenteeism Results
 - VII. Chicago Public Schools Policy on Attendance and Truancy
 - VIII. Task Force Committees, Assignments and Updates
 - A. Best Practices Committee
 - B. Public Hearing Committee
 - C. Report Committee
 - IX. Public Hearing Schedules and Logistics
 - X. New Business and Open Discussion
 - XI. Public Participation
 - XII. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



February 28, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 10:11 a.m.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

The following task force members were present for the meeting:

Chicago

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Juliet Bromer
Aarti Dhupelia
Rick Gravatt
Leslie Juby
LaTanya McDade
Michael Seelig
Antoinette Taylor
Jack Wuest

Jeff Aranowski
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Kevin Fahey
Bobbie Gregg (by Kevin Walsh)
Robert Lee
Melissa Mitchell
Elizabeth Swanson
Dana Wright
Rene Heybach (by Patricia Nix-Hodes)

Springfield

Jackie Price

Arthur Sutton

Telephone

Paul Sarvela
Mary Howard
Maria Trejo
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Neli Vazquez Rowland

Madelyn James
Crystal Laura
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Barbara Sherry

Those who were not present included the following members:

Anna Alvarado
Christine Boyd
Sen. Jacqueline Collins
Neha Gupta-Patel
Laura Kieran
Kareem Pender
Theresa Plascencia

Jennifer Berne
Andrew Broy
Sen. Michael Connelly
Jim Kestner
Heidi Mueller
Representative Sandi Pihos

Kevin Walsh introduced himself as the Cook County Administrator for Education and Transition Services within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) who was present for the meeting in place of Bobbie Gregg who was appointed interim director of DCFS.

Madelyn James, director of Voices for Illinois Children's "Great at Eight" initiative, was appointed by the governor to the task force.

Patricia Nix-Hodes was present on behalf of Rene Heybach.

Mary Riseling of the Illinois Secretary of State's Office was present to represent the interests of Jackie Price who was unable to stay for the entire meeting.

The Chicago Teachers' Union will appoint a new member in place of a teacher on the task force who cannot attend due to the fact the meetings are held during school time.

III. Approval of Minutes from the January 31, 2014 Meeting

The minutes were unanimously approved.

IV. Miguel del Valle - Chairman of the Illinois P-20 Council and Illinois Commerce

Commission Commissioner

As chairman of the Illinois P-20 Council, Mr. del Valle explained the council began operation in 2010, and is charged with fostering collaboration among state agencies, education institutions, local schools, community groups, employers, and families to ensure a successful transition from **preschool (P)** through **post-graduate (20)** studies/training and into the workforce.

To this end, the Council created a Joint Educational Leadership Committee which is comprised of all the heads of state agencies that govern education and workforce issues and meets regularly to align programs and initiatives to ensure that the state meets its goal to have 60% of Illinoisans equipped with high quality credentials by 2025.

The P-20 Council is aligned with reform efforts in the state as it started operating around the time the state had submitted its first Race to the Top application. The Council focused on a number of areas and created a committee structure that is reflective of those reform efforts and supportive of the implementation of recommendations:

- Data Assessment and Accountability Committee;
- Family, Youth, and Community Engagement Committee;
- Finance and Governance Committee;
- Implementation Review Committee;
- School, College, and Career Readiness Committee; and
- Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Committee.

The Data Assessment and Accountability Committee created a subcommittee that developed the current school report card in partnership with the State Board of Education. The subcommittee members consulted with people from across the state and conducted over sixty focus groups to come up with a user-friendly report card that generates the kind of information parents and students can use and informs educators and administrators as well.

During his twenty year tenure as an Illinois legislator, Mr. del Valle served on a task force that recommended that every school utilize a freshman on-track indicator to keep track of students' grades, attendance, and other factors so staff can intervene in a timely manner in order to provide the supports students need to be successful. He said teachers need to track, report, and collaborate about students, because it is not a one person show. They need to all assume responsibility for the success of students, particularly in the very critical freshman year. School attendance issues also motivated him to sponsor bills that added the chronic truancy rate as a report card indicator and increased the compulsory age of attendance from 16 to 17, in part, because of the lack of options in the workforce for a person who lacks a diploma or GED.

He explained further that structural changes need to take place to provide more options to kids: dual enrollment opportunities, dual credit opportunities, partnerships, and strengthened STEM education such as what the P-20 Council is trying to do through the Illinois Pathways Initiative. He said we should offer more career and technical education, make school more inviting and interesting, and provide more reasons for kids to be in school. We shouldn't just focus strictly on English/language arts and math scores, because if we do, we will continue to see an increased dropout rate, according to Mr. del Valle. We have to provide more options for kids, get them more excited about school, get them to see the connection between school and their lives, and make it relevant.

Mr. del Valle offered some attendance statistics from the report cards for schools in his area on the near northwest side of Chicago which revealed increased chronic truancy rates as students age from pre-kindergarten to adolescence. The problem starts in the early years and worsens as children get older.

Even though he was one of the first legislators who wrote a letter of support for a network of charter schools when they were getting started, he began to become aware that charters were getting rid of kids too quickly, that they had high suspension and expulsion rates, but there were no numbers initially to prove or refute this. He said he has to commend the Chicago Public Schools for finally putting out some numbers that showed the critics were right. Principals in the area were attesting to the fact that kids were coming back to them from the charter schools.

He decried the fact that we don't address the correlation between absenteeism and suspension. He spoke of policy improvements that have resulted in fewer in-school suspensions, thanks to the work of the advocacy groups. He said it has become a national issue to cut down on suspensions and look for alternative ways, like restorative justice, to deal with behavioral issues and other issues as well.

He defended the Common Core saying it provides more rigorous standards and will better prepare students for college and career. He explained that initially student performance on related tests will reflect a downturn, but with time and redirected attention to the details of student behavior and school attendance, the results will improve.

As the director of the Boys and Girls Club in the Humboldt Park area and as the executive director of the Association House, he deals with children and families and is very aware that kids get frustrated because sometimes they do not know what is going on in their classrooms. In schools you see the frustration on kids' faces which leads to dropping out, a situation that reminds him of when he did not speak English and went to first grade and no one could communicate effectively with him. Frustration, he said, leads to absenteeism.

We have to find a way to deal with that frustration so they do not tune out in the classroom or tune out by not showing up in the classroom. He urged the task force to figure out how to count the children accurately who are absent or truant and analyze the data in order to develop the kinds of strategies that will turn the numbers around. He explained that strategies have to be personalized to fit individual students' needs based on their family situations which can only be discerned by going into the homes.

Mr. del Valle thanked Representative Linda Chapa LaVia for her work on behalf of the students of Illinois and reminded the task force of the goal of the P-20 Council is to assure that by the year 2025, 60% of our adult population will have post-secondary credentials: vocational training certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, etc. He said this goal will not be achieved unless we close the achievement gap that separates our children of color, who comprise half the state's school population, from other students. He explained one way to close the gap is to address the chronic truancy rate as well as suspension and expulsion issues.

Discussion followed on the subject of home visits and interventions with families in order to address underlying causes of students' absence. Representative Linda Chapa LaVia spoke of a pioneer program in her district which uses firefighters as mentors to children. Maria Trejo explained her organization uses parents to visit the homes of troubled families to offer help.

Neli Vazquez Rowland said she has information on programs to help students and their families in temporary living situations, including many success stories. Patricia Nix-Hodes, representing Rene Heybach from the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, said the Coalition released a new report that finds gaps in educational supports for Illinois homeless students, particularly for students with disabilities and their parents. One particular issue identified by many survey respondents was the schools' capacity to identify and enroll students in temporary living situations was very limited despite the fact this is a priority of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Beth Swanson, an appointee of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and Dana Wright, appointed by Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, introduced themselves to the members of the task force.

V. School to Prison Pipeline

Chairperson Taylor explained that just as there is a correlation between absenteeism and truancy, there is also one from truancy to prison. She called upon three members of the task force who work in law enforcement and corrections to provide their points of view: Rick Gravatt, Kevin Fahey, and Dana Wright.

Rick Gravatt, Acting School Superintendent for the Department of Juvenile Justice, explained there are six facilities across the state that house approximately 800 juvenile offenders: Chicago, Warrenville (females), St. Charles, Kewanee, Pere Marquette, and Harrisburg. He said they are trying to confine only the students that literally need to be there, and their enrollment is down from 2,500 several years ago.

Their school district is currently under a consent decree. Their truancy issues stem from the difficulty of hiring teachers and support staff. It takes them, on average, eight months to post a position and eventually hire someone for it. Expediting the hiring process is a critical issue.

The Department of Juvenile Justice was separated from the Department of Corrections in 2006, and their students come from districts across the state. A large majority of their students have experienced trauma (i.e., physical or sexual abuse); at least half have suffered multiple incidents or such trauma. Many of their students have experienced school failure and since one of the ways you are identified for special education is through failure in school, half have IEPs, and most have less than the appropriate amount of high school credits. They have a virtual high school that meets some of their needs and helps to bolster their efforts to aid in students' credit recovery.

He considers his program a shot at a second chance. He explained that many of their students wind up in the Department of Corrections, and they often see some of their former students on the news, unlike other teachers across the state who run into their former students in a grocery store. Mr. Gravatt explained that there are those, however, who do seize the opportunity for a second chance. He related the story of a young man who was the valedictorian of his graduation class whose mother and grandmother marveled at his success, recalling the days he was a truant running the streets. In the environment of the Department of Juvenile Justice, he was able to achieve because it is mandatory that the students go to school all year long. Most of their students succeed at school and recover credits because education within their department is a very positive thing and there are fewer distractions.

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia said she is sponsoring legislation to have the money follow the kids as they are in the juvenile justice system for four to seven months.

Mr. Gravatt said he wants to reduce the rate of recidivism, so when an incarcerated student walks in the door, he is planning for when that young person walks out the door. He explained they are trying to address the academic and social needs as well as the job readiness of the students. He feels that if they don't address the trauma, the mental health issues, and the substance abuse issues which affect 70% of the students, it will be difficult to educate them.

He explained further that there is so much that needs to be done. It is up to teachers everywhere to provide an atmosphere that makes students want to be there. He said we have to correct the situations that cause children to miss school or drop out of school or we will be facing dire consequences with these young people. He said 70% of his students are from Cook County, but he had no specific data on Chicago.

Sgt. Kevin Fahey explained that officers fill out school absentee forms for kids found on the street during school hours. Depending on the situation, they either bring them home or to school; in some instances they are brought into the police station.

The number of students for whom absentee forms were issued:

- 2011 – 34,770 – 69 arrests
- 2012 – 36,669 – 260 arrests

The number of young people arrested on school grounds:

- 2011 – 4,429
- 2012 – 3,768

Since the law gives officers a little leeway, they make judgment calls and approximately 40% are given informal or formal station adjustments, referred to an agency, and sent home to parents; the remaining 60% are referred to court or detained. Of these arrestees, about 60% are given an alternative by the state's attorney office, so out of 4,000 arrests, about a thousand go through the criminal justice system.

The vast majority of kids who are stopped by the police are going to school, they are just late. You can tell by looking at their address and comparing it to the address of the school. The number of absentee reports went up during 2011-2012, but the number of actual arrests went down. CPS is copied on the absentee reports.

Chairperson Taylor said when students are tardy, they are missing school, they are not in the seat learning. She said she applauds the police department for monitoring neighborhoods for absent and tardy kids and intervening. She wondered how many kids only went to school because they saw a squad car.

A discussion ensued about reasons high school students are tardy or absent from school. Suggestions included fear of other students or neighborhood thugs, low self-esteem, substance abuse among students and/or their parents, negative school experiences, etc.

Dana Wright: Ms. Wright suggested task force members visit the websites for the National Criminal Justice Reference Services and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention which have articles posted about factors - low self-esteem, child neglect, abandonment, mental and physical health concerns, substance abuse among parents, poverty, family dysfunction, and negative school experiences – which contribute to school attendance issues. One of the articles from the National Criminal Justice Reference Services was about a juvenile court judge who explained a typical day in which he encountered 40 juvenile truants and found that 37 of them were victims of abuse, neglect, endangerment, alcohol and drug abuse within the family, and mental health issues; in fact, 18 of the juveniles had prior referrals for mental health issues themselves.

She said a juvenile facility is split between the abused and neglected youth on one side and the delinquents on the other side typically in one building. Many people think the delinquent side is the side that presents more problems, but you find the problems run deeper with the abused and neglected children. Abuse and neglect lead to truancy and other complications.

Ms. Wright spoke of a pilot program operated by the Cook County Sheriff's Department in the south suburbs in which a non-uniformed staff officer with a degree in psychology is working on the middle school level to reach out to students with attendance difficulties and interacting with their families and schools. She has discovered that some students miss school because of bullying, undiagnosed learning deficiencies which cause them to feign illness, ineffective parenting and supervision, and responsibility for other siblings. Ms Wright said the last issue is huge because older siblings have to look after the needs of the younger ones while the mother, who is usually a single parent, works. The lack of structure in many of these homes compromises both regular attendance and the school experience for the children, and the resulting difficulties cause many children to run afoul of school authorities and eventually the law.

Mr. Aranowski asked about roadblocks to the provision of services in a jail environment, and Ms. Wright indicated the security clearances at correctional facilities are a challenge as is the lack of communication among agencies.

A discussion ensued about the need to organize resources in a systemic fashion and forge better partnerships between schools and agencies. Representative LaVia expressed concern about the insufficient number of counselors and social workers to interact with troubled families. Chairperson Taylor voiced her regret over the fact many agencies offer quality programs but function in silos. Rick Gravatt cautioned that you have to harness resources and build them around the kids and get all the related service personnel to work together.

Further discussion provided some examples of systemic cohesion. Patricia Nix-Hodes stated she was recently gratified to learn that the Cook County Sheriff's office refers families facing evictions to a social worker who can help them find support services. Leslie Juby said the Best Practice Committee is tracking things that worked in other states. An underlying similarity is there usually is a judge on the side of successful truancy initiatives who stays on the side and works with all the agencies. This committee has also found examples of collaboration among state and city agencies in certain locales that have found ways to fund initiatives. They have also uncovered the fact that there is a similarity to the composition of groups who come together to solve the truancy problem and a similarity of tactics.

In reference to students with disabilities who miss school for an extended period of time, Chairperson Taylor reminded the task force of a family in the Chicago Tribune series with a child whose disability had not been diagnosed and was "at risk." By the time the problem was addressed with an evaluation process, the child needed a therapeutic day school. Then there had to be a reintegration process back to the home school. Representative LaVia said there are gaps within the system and reminded everyone that the absentee rate for students with disabilities was extremely high.

Mr. del Valle brought the discussion around to the subject of early childhood education and explained that Illinois is ahead of many states in this area despite many budgetary cuts. He said the state has a statutory goal for universal pre-school, and this is the level you have to start at because you have a captive parent then. He said you have to get the parent fully engaged and, in the process, you have to train them to be their child's first teacher, to be advocates for their child, and to know how to deal with the systems all around them. It is easy to engage the parent at this stage because their child is little.

Madelyn James echoed Mr.del Valle's comments about increasing family engagement at the early childhood level since this is where the truancy habit is rooted. The families that are the hardest to serve with the most stressors and challenges, she explained, are the families who will have the highest rates of

absenteeism. She said the task force has to address family supports and school policies in order to reduce chronic truancy and absenteeism rates. She said ISBE has a draft of guidelines for family engagement.

VI. The Focus on Truancy and Excessive Absenteeism Results

Chairperson Taylor directed people to the worksheet summary entitled “The Focus on Truancy and Excessive Absenteeism” in their folders. Everyone had been asked to fill out the form and indicate what they knew about the reasons students are not in school - truancy and absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, parental choices - around three focal points: students with special needs, students in temporary living situations, and students who are or have been involved in the juvenile justice system.

Chairperson Taylor said there has to be a standardization of terms. Some people think of truancy as the refusal of a child to go to school on a regular basis, and they present many questions about the child. Truancy is not just the child who refuses to go to school; in fact, it may be the parent who doesn't clearly understand the child needs to go a certain number of days each school year. Parents and school officials have to be on the same page regarding what constitutes an excused absence. A parent needs to understand that even though the school was called and a note was written, non-attendance can be a problem (unless the absence is necessary because of sickness or a family emergency or another rare circumstance). She said we have to make it clear to parents their children shouldn't stay home from school.

Mr. Aranowski said ISBE has no rules regarding truancy; the general assembly has defined truancy, and we have some remediation policies for chronic truancy. The general assembly's definition of truancy is quite simple and straightforward: if you are absent for all or part of a school day without an excuse, you are truant. The hard part is what you do with that.

Representative LaVia said we need a baseline for CPS on attendance - a solid, uniformed, communicated message. Mr. Aranowski explained he presented the statutory side and now we have to drill down to the uniform application.

Ms. Dhupelia said we have to create the understanding that absences are not good for the students and repeated absences contribute more to the dropout rate than low test scores.

VII. Chicago Public Schools Policy on Attendance and Truancy

Chairperson Taylor referred to the CPS Policy Manual excerpt on Absenteeism and Truancy which was included in the prepared packets for task force members. This policy was adopted in 2006, so she said we have to determine what is appropriate now and what is no longer sustainable.

Mr. Aranowski presented graphs which compared the number and percentage of chronic truants and students in CPS and across the state from the 2008-2009 to 2011-2012 school years. Prior to July 28, 2011, chronic truancy was defined as 10% or more days of unexcused absences; on that date the law changed to 5%. That accounts, in part, for the spike in truancy rates as state rates tripled as a result. Before this change, the percentage of CPS students who were chronically truant ranged from 7-11% between 2008 and 2011; after the standard for chronic truancy was changed, the rate for CPS soared to 30% and that statewide percentage went up from 3% to 9%. In terms of numbers, 181,785 students statewide were chronically truant during the 2011-2012 school year and 110,960 were chronically truant in CPS; prior to 2011, the numbers of students who were chronically truant ranged from one-third to one-half of these numbers.

Ms. Juby asked CPS for a copy of their administrative policy manual because she said the devil is in the details. Mr. Aranowski said he would reach out to the Illinois Association of School Boards for theirs because they provide template policies and policy reference which districts use to ensure they are up to date on the latest provisions.

VIII. Task Force Committees, Assignments, and Updates

- A. Best Practices Committee – Work is well underway as committee members are in the process of reviewing a variety of documents and studies relative to issues of truancy and absenteeism. Heidi Mueller is chair.
- B. Public Hearing Committee – This committee has planned for three public hearings, the first of which will be held on March 10.
- C. Report Writing Committee

IX. Public Hearing Schedules and Logistics

The public hearing dates have been scheduled for March 10, April 28, and May 3. Chairperson Taylor said the task force tried to be sensitive to public need and planned one hearing for a Saturday, the other two at night. Senator Jacqueline Collins will host the April 28 meeting, and the L.E.A.D.E.R.S. network on the west side will chair the first one. The final meeting will be hosted by the Pilgrim Baptist Church of South Chicago.

It was determined that information about a variety of available resources would be available at the hearings for families in temporary living situations, with special needs children, and with children in the juvenile justice system. There will be ADA accessibility, Spanish translators, and an interpreter on hand to sign for the hearing impaired.

Juliet Bromer asked about the format for public hearings because, as she explained, the information you get depends on the questions you ask, so you must be very intentional. Representative LaVia stated that the conversation will be directed through a series of questions that can be answered on paper hard copies or via smart phones and supplied laptops. The Public Hearings Committee will develop questions for parents to gauge their understanding of what the policies are, why their children are absent, the definition of truancy, the difference between excused and unexcused absences, etc. There will also be forms available for them to submit ideas and suggestions.

X. New Business and Open Discussion

Mary Riseling of the Illinois Secretary of State's Office informed the task force that this office has 136 statewide locations at which people in temporary living situations can obtain free identification cards. Representative La Via said the Secretary of State's Office and public libraries are good sources of information for the public.

XI. Public Participation

There was no comment offered by a member of the general public.

XII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

March 31, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 2-025

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the February 28, 2014 Meeting
 - IV. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Presentation/Discussion
 - V. Response to Intervention (RtI) Presentation/Discussion
 - VI. March 10, 2014 Public Hearing Debrief
 - VII. Best Practices Committee Debrief
 - VIII. Special Education Implementation and Recommendations
 - IX. Discussion of Old Business (as needed)
 - X. New Business and Open Discussion
 - XI. Public Participation
 - XII. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



March 31, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

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

Senator Jacqueline Collins was present and addressed the committee to communicate her gratitude to the task force. She said everyone is concerned about our children and education is a key component of their development. Unless a child is in the classroom, there is no opportunity to access all the advantages a good education provides.

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia was on the phone and was represented at the meeting by Pat Dal Santo, Superintendent of the Kane County Regional Office of Education.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

Chicago

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Jennifer Berne
Andrew Broy (Represented by Eric Johnson)
Andrea Evans
Madelyn James
Crystal Laura
Heidi Mueller
Antoinette Taylor
Kevin Walsh
Jack Wuest

Jeff Aranowski
Juliet Bromer
Senator Jacqueline Collins
Rene Heybach
Leslie Juby
Melissa Mitchell
Michael Seelig
Maria Trejo
Dana Wright

Springfield

Christine Boyd

Jackie Price

Telephone

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Barbara Sherry

Paul Sarvela

Those who were not present included the following members:

Anna Alvarado
Aarti Dhupelia
Rick Gravatt
Mary C. Howard
Laura Kieran
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Kareem Pender
Theresa Plascencia
Arthur Sutton

Sen. Michael Connelly
Kevin Fahey
Sarah Hains
Jim Kestner
Robert Lee
LaTanya McDade
Representative Sandi Pihos
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Elizabeth Swanson

III. Approval of Minutes from the February 28, 2014 Meeting

The minutes were subject to review by Mr. Miguel del Valle of the P-20 Council; once reviewed, the task force did not have a quorum to approve.

IV. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Presentation/Discussion

Chairperson Taylor introduced Michele Carmichael from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Roberta Brown of the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Collaborative (ISTAC) who were asked to explain the programming available for districts that wish to increase their capacity to address a variety of student needs. Multi-tiered Systems of Support have proven successful in directing resources to the areas of greatest need as determined through a careful examination of data. Ms. Taylor explained that a systemic approach to student and parental supports is something the task force might want to promote in the Chicago Public Schools as these supports can be utilized to remedy absenteeism, chronic truancy, and related problems.

Michele Carmichael, an ISBE principal consultant for behavioral supports, student wellness, and the ISTAC initiative explained that as of July 1, 2014, there will no longer be a separate, state-sponsored initiative for PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention Services) as emphasis is shifting from separate, siloed initiatives to integrated solutions for whole child wellness and success. Evidenced-based practices will be applied to truancy, student health, school improvement, and student with disability needs, etc. in an effort to promote career and college readiness. Insofar as truancy is concerned, Ms. Carmichael explained, the emphasis should be on the community perspective because truancy relates to student disabilities, behavioral issues, parental problems (substance abuse, mental health issues), and a host of other difficulties related to family life and the communities in which students dwell.

ISBE's Center for Specialized Instruction, Nutrition, and Wellness is funded under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and uses discretionary funds to contract with several non-profits to provide training and technical assistance to schools on certain initiatives such as PBIS for behavior supports, RTI for academic interventions, and others - but all functioning separately from one another. ISTAC had found that while providing training to districts on specifically requested programming, they would pull data and methodology from other programs, many of which were structured to offer multiple tiers of services. ISTAC also found districts felt they did not have time to implement separate programs and requested specific alterations to suit their needs. According to Ms. Carmichael, "We looked at our financial resources, human resources, and our best practices," for the most cost-effective programs "and realized there was a duplication of effort amid a vast array of acronyms."

Ms. Carmichael explained the graphic used most often to illustrate Multi-tiered Systems of Support is a triangle. (The broad triangle base is illustrative of the widespread, core supports/instruction provided to an entire student group. The narrowing of the triangle represents the decreasing number of students who require additional layers of targeted supports to meet academic or behavioral goals. All supports/instruction offered are evidence-based in that data have shown them to be successful.)

ISTAC is now the larger umbrella or service entity for training and technical assistance in the application of Multi-tiered Systems of Support in the following five focus areas which are identified with their previous affiliation:

1. Behavior - PBIS,
2. Educational Environment - Project CHOICES,
3. Family and Community Engagement - PEP (Parent Educator Partnership),
4. Special Populations - IATTAP (Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project), and
5. Transition.

Multi-tiered Systems of Support have their basis in the public health model of promotion/prevention which has been around a number of years and is evidenced by the campaign to educate people about the dangers of smoking, from broad-based marketing efforts to promote nonsmoking habits among all people to specific instructions from a surgeon for someone stricken with a smoking-related disease.

Multi-tiered Systems of Support offer a continuum of services where you start with all students and provide similar promotions for well-being. At this first level of tiered support, you also apply universal screening for academic,

behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning. As barriers emerge (typically for about 20% of students), evidence-based interventions are implemented that increase with intensity as needed (for approximately 5% of students). Student progress is monitored in response to implemented interventions, and staff engages in systematic data-based decision-making about services needed for students based on specific outcomes.

Ms. Carmichael explained further that RTI (Response to Intervention) is the umbrella over Multi-tiered Systems of Support as it is fully data-reliant for progress monitoring. It is the process through which you see how effective the interventions you have provided students are working. You decide what data to collect first, which data informs about student progress, and which data informs your effectiveness.

She said a misunderstanding had occurred among people in regard to RTI and other tiered programming about whether you should jump immediately to the third tier for some students. She advised that you measure success and layer on additional supports as needed which are tailored to a student's specific need according to collected and analyzed data: "Look at all student needs, not just academic. What gets monitored is what gets focused on." She explained that ISTAC works with districts "to help them understand the types of data they should be collecting to identify the types of issues they need to work on. Some of those issues will be more than behavior – they will also include educational environment, attendance, special populations - so we look at data specific to each problem and conduct training processes."

Ms. Carmichael emphasized that the whole child, integrated approach reduces the fragmentation of efforts to support learning and deters the marginalization of programs that contribute to the social/emotional well-being of a student. In schools, people tend to look at things from a governance and management perspective and make financial decisions about programming in ways that sometimes do not benefit children, such as cutting music and art programs while there may be a duplication of efforts related to curriculum and instruction initiatives. With ISTAC, she explained, they are taking a more holistic approach and adjusting their focus to what makes a child, a school, and a community whole. An integrated approach that relies on data gathering and analysis helps to organize programs and manage resources to maximize the benefit to students.

A question was asked about whether or not this methodology would ever incorporate data related to crime rates in the school community. Ms. Carmichael said it would because when you are considering issues related to truancy and absenteeism, local crime statistics come into play, including data about the rates of child abuse and neglect. This analysis helps you make decisions about the type of programming that should be explored.

With regard to the community, Ms. Carmichael addressed the need to identify the community providers that have evidence-based practices with successful outcomes for children and families and how they should be at the table to solve the truancy problem and other problems as well. She added a note of caution about efforts to combat the effects of life in a community plagued by violence, however, as schools cannot offer therapeutic levels of interventions. They can instead choose to be welcoming and safe environments and ensure each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged in the school setting. She added that both Superintendent Christopher Koch and Assistant Superintendent Elizabeth Hanselman are huge proponents of the social/emotional development of children and how the participation of parents and community providers can enhance these efforts within a school.

Ms. Carmichael said schools have to develop protocols, procedures, and practices to foster school improvement and responsiveness to student academic and functional needs. Alignment of goals, collaboration of efforts, and integration of solutions will improve the educational experience of many students by removing barriers that inhibit success.

An integrated approach is the efficient and the most effective. "Instead of just focusing on truancy, you should figure out how this issue impacts other areas of students' lives. Truancy is just one indicator of a problem. Data is not a four letter word. Data in and of itself is useless if it is not used for problem solving. Drill down into the data and keep asking why."

She likes the fact that CPS has school improvement aligned with college and career readiness and asked where special education was. She said the child with a disability has issues related to the ones they are talking about but is kept separate. The special education population has a lot of the issues related to truancy.

Ms. Carmichael offered an additional explanation of ISTAC's new direction: "We provide foundational services for all. We build local capacity. Our role is to basically train CPS to do its own work so we can leave. We don't want to be in there for more than a couple of years. With our PBIS initiative, we have been in and out of Chicago for the last 17 years. We are starting from scratch now and our services are going to look very different from before."

ISTAC has some strategies that have worked well in other locations, and district trainings will be coordinated through the Center for School Improvement (CSI). These trainings will be offered in accordance with the Multi-tiered Systems of Support model, starting with foundational services in best practices which will suffice for 80% of districts, 'focus' districts receiving targeted supports for achievement gaps (15%), and 'priority' districts receiving intensive supports for large scale systemic changes (5%). CSI is the single point of entry and will be coordinating all the services that once were fragmented and unconnected. The will provide external partnerships and resources for all these districts, including CPS.

Per the federal government and IDEA, the state has to measure the performance of districts according to over twenty indicators related to special education: graduation rates, suspensions/expulsions, transition, disproportionality, preschool outcomes, educational environment, to name a few. If a district is not a focus or priority district but has findings with regard to SPP indicators, ISTAC will provide support to them, according to Ms. Carmichael. "Supports are not just training. It means follow-up coaching to build internal capacity in accordance with our service delivery cycle:

- Look at the data.
- Assess the data.
- Make decisions.
- Make a plan.
- Support the plan through professional development.
- Monitor how effective the interventions are."

Chairperson Taylor thanked Michelle Carmichael and expressed her happiness that so many initiatives which were operating in silos have all been joined together under ISTAC. This collaboration and integration of efforts and best practices will mean a lot for our state in general and CPS specifically.

V. Response to Intervention (RTI) Presentation/Discussion

Larry Fairbanks of the ISBE office in Springfield announced he would be taking over as state director of the State Personnel Development Grant which funds RTI in Illinois. These funds facilitate a coordinated statewide system of professional development through instructional leaders/coaches so districts can increase their capacity to provide a Multi-tiered Systems of Support. He introduced Patricia Graczyk of the Illinois RTI Network who was there to present an RTI overview as it is a multi-tiered system of academic support that has applications for districts seeking to address truancy and absenteeism.

Dr. Graczyk said RTI provides a framework for students to receive appropriate (tailored to student need) instruction to maximize student achievement and reduce behavioral problems. This is important in terms of truancy because if students are successful in school, they are more likely to attend. Studies have shown that RTI has a huge impact on student achievement.

The five critical elements of RTI are the following:

- Multi-tiered System of Support based on student needs
- Quality instruction (evidence-based)
- Focus on prevention
- Accurate data guide decisions about instruction
- School-family partnerships

The multiple tiers of RTI include the following:

1. Tier One - universal tier featuring core curriculum, can feature differentiated instruction (pacing, grouping)
2. Tier Two- instructional supports and interventions in addition to the core curriculum, typically in small groups
3. Tier Three – individualized, intensive supports in addition to core curriculum, usually individualized to bring students closer to grade level expectations.

The RTI process requires the collection of data to determine student progress and the effectiveness of instruction at every tier. Tracking data is gathered via benchmarking (periodic assessments) and progress monitoring (weekly) and determines if interventions need to be withdrawn or changed.

It was asked what constitutes an intervention, and it was explained that a change in instructional practice or instructional programming (like LEXIA, Reading Recovery, explicit instruction) constitutes an intervention.

School/Family partnerships are very heavily emphasized in Multi-tiered Systems of Support. Parents must be informed and educated about the supports, how they can access resources for their students, how monitoring is done, and how their children are performing. Schools should have multiple methods of communication with parents, including inviting them to participate in advisory bodies.

Truancy prevention starts in preschool at Tier One with strong attendance focus, promote a culture of attendance. According to Dr. Graczyk, Attendance Works advises the following tiered model for attendance:

1. Tier One – satisfactory attendance
2. Tier Two – at risk attendance (5-10% absent)
3. Tier Three – significant absence (+10%)

Data must be gathered relative to a student's attendance patterns and the reasons school days are missed which then determine the interventions to be applied.

VI. March 10, 2014 Public Hearing Debrief

Jeff Aranowski provided an update on the first public hearing which was held on March 10 at the New Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church with 16 people in attendance. A questionnaire was distributed which polled parents about their knowledge of their children's schools' attendance policies, barriers to school enrollment in their communities, a contact person to answer their attendance and enrollment questions, etc. He said that a review of the data gathered via the questionnaire and statements expressed at the forum revealed a strong indication that people want truant officers back. They thought that state law and CPS policy are satisfactory but lack teeth as there are no consequences. The problems brought up involved crossing gang lines and socio-economic issues. Mr. Aranowski said there were many informational pieces available for parents on homelessness, special education, etc.

Maria Trejo wanted to know if we are targeting organizations or parents because the first meeting was attended by organizations and not parents. Should we be more strategic about inviting parents? She also said one size does not fit all and that different communities have different needs.

Chairperson Taylor expressed concern about the small number of parents at the first forum. She explained that attendance by the community organization representatives is wonderful and she is depending on them to bring the message back to the community as well as encourage parents to participate in future forums.

Fanny Diego Alvarez asked about distributing the questionnaire to parents outside of the public forums, perhaps through the community-based organizations or at the school level. Ms. Taylor expressed concern about the willingness of parents to speak candidly if forums were held at schools or if questionnaires were distributed by the schools.

Maria Trejo wondered if there could be additional forums in Latino communities as she represents people on the northwest side (Logan Square). Madelyn James said parents are just as uneasy about crossing certain lines as children are. She suggested that some Latino families from the northwest side are not likely to travel to the forum planned on the southeast side.

Andrea Evans shared with the task force some root cause possibilities for truancy and excessive absenteeism at the school level: teacher absenteeism is often linked to student absenteeism, student fear of bullying inside the building affects attendance, and students who have been retained are absent more than other children. She said it isn't always connected to the family as there are problems within a school and hopes that the task force recommends that principals collect data to see how teacher absenteeism affects student attendance and to identify other root causes. Sometimes students cannot develop a proper relationship with teachers, are experiencing unchecked academic difficulties, or are receiving special education services, so they disengage. Healthcare issues also contribute to attendance difficulties, according to Ms. Evans who added that attendance is better at schools that have a nurse on staff.

VII. Best Practices Committee Debrief

Heidi Mueller said the Best Practice Committee needs clarification on the process for the reviews of documentation. She wondered if she should combine it all in one document, and how the information should be digested and fed to the committee.

Chairperson Taylor said the goal is to hear from everyone because of the enormity of information and each summary will be presented to the task force in a brief, condensed manner so it can be decided what we would use as recommendations from the task force.

VIII. Special Education Implementation and Recommendations

Olga Prybl from Equip for Equality, a federally-funded legal advocacy organization for people with disabilities across the state, will come back in April as there was not sufficient time for her presentation.

Madelyn James asked if she can have information relative to the student with disability truancy rate according to diagnosis and grade level.

IX. Discussion of Old Business (as needed)

X. New Business and Open Discussion

XI. Public Participation

XII. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

April 28, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 9-040

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the February 28, 2014 and March 31, 2014 Meetings
 - IV. Special Education Implications and Recommendations
 - V. Best Practices Committee Debrief and Summaries
 - VI. Protocol for Recommendations to the General Assembly
 - VII. New Business/Open Discussion
 - VIII. Public Comment
 - IX. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



April 28, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chairperson Antoinette Taylor called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

Chicago

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Jennifer Berne
Andrew Broy (Eric Johnson)
Aarti Dhupelia
Rene Heybach
Madelyn James
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Heidi Mueller
Michael Seelig
Antoinette Taylor
Dana Wright (Tangenese Porter)

Jeff Aranowski
Juliet Bromer
Senator Jacqueline Collins
Sarah Hains
Mary C. Howard (Cassie Thiem)
Leslie Juby
Melissa Mitchell
Theresa Plascencia
Elizabeth Swanson (Jennifer Keeling)
Kevin Walsh

Springfield

Jackie Price

Arthur Sutton

Telephone

Christine Boyd
Andrea Evans
Robert Lee
Maria Trejo

Rick Gravatt
Crystal Laura
Paul Sarvela

Not Present

Anna Alvarado
Kevin Fahey
Laura Kieran
LaTanya McDade
Representative Sandi Pihos
Barbara Sherry

Sen. Michael Connelly
Jim Kestner
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Kareem Pender
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Jack Wuest

III. Approval of Minutes

There was a motion to approve the minutes from the February 28, 2014 and March 31, 2014 meetings. The motion was seconded and carried by a unanimous voice vote.

IV. Special Education Implications and Recommendations

This agenda item was postponed until the next meeting which will take place on May 12, 2014.

V. Best Practices Committee Debrief and Summaries

Chairperson Taylor asked Heidi Mueller to address the task force on the work completed by the members of the Best Practice Committee of which she is the chair. This committee had completed summary reviews of a variety of research reports, articles, and documents related to best practices in truancy solutions that had been emailed to all task force members the previous week so they could prepare for discussion during today's meeting.

Ms. Mueller explained that the summary template she provided the committee members was constructed in accordance with Aarti Dhupelia's 'buckets' which were offered in an earlier meeting as a means to organize the various findings and recommendations related to issue of truancy: 1) data sharing and uses, 2) community marketing and awareness building, 3) community resources, 4) policy barriers and opportunities, and 5) school best practice. She explained further that each reviewer was also asked to supply relevant comments and recommendations as well as related resources as a means of sharing their personal expertise and experience. Ms. Mueller acknowledged that every committee member completed their assigned research summary and expressed her gratitude for their commitment of time and talent.

Heidi Mueller is leaving the task force because she is going to the Department of Juvenile Justice as the Deputy Director of Programs. Ms. Taylor said Ms. Mueller's document summary will provide the baseline for the task force's recommendations to the General Assembly.

Madelyn James said her organization (Voices for Illinois Children) completed an issue brief which contains recommendations to improve mental health outcomes for families and children by developing a comprehensive approach to dealing with community and domestic trauma across the state. In consultation with professionals in early childhood development, 23 community dialogues were held around the state to gauge the needs of families against available resources. They were looking for recommendations to improve the outcomes for families with children from birth to age eight and examined issues specifically related to families with the following characteristics: children with disabilities, a parent on active military duty, and teen parents. One idea that grew out of all this was the need for community hubs, places in the community which could serve a variety of needs of families through coordination and alignment of services which would have a positive impact on school attendance. Her organization has also looked at the effect of homelessness on children especially in terms of their cognitive development.

Laurene Heybach commented that in her work with the homeless, she came to parallel conclusions in that the families were invariably very young and were victims of community and domestic trauma. She also explained that there are significant cognitive effects on children who lack housing or move around frequently. Ms/ Taylor added that the deleterious effects of homelessness or inadequate housing are even pronounced for students with disabilities.

Melissa Mitchell said a contact on the New York City task force said the issues faced by the homeless really tipped the needle in their work because of the need to lend some stability to the lives of these families by providing adequate supports.

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia asked CPS what percentage of their students were homeless or in temporary living situations. Michael Seelig and Aarti Dhupelia said they would find out, but it is more than 10%. She explained she would like additional studies completed to figure out the most effective way to distribute resources to this population.

Ms. James said there were far more resources and services proportionally in Chicago for the homeless than there are throughout the rest of the state, but services suffer from a lack of coordination.

Mr. Aranowski added a cautionary note about solutions for the homeless for education purposes that involve reaching out to shelters due to the fact that the vast majority of the CPS school families, perhaps 90%, that are considered

homeless are actually in temporary living situations doubled up with friends or relatives. It is hard to isolate outreach when the client group you wish to serve is difficult to reach.

Ms. Mitchell commented that many of the issues that affect the homeless are like “low hanging fruit” as their needs are so basic and related that she knew of a school where the janitor regularly washed the clothing of some inadequately housed students to help them avoid embarrassment in the classroom.

Representative LaVia cited the efforts of a school district outside of Chicago that provides their homeless children with cash cards to use for clothing and other purchases. As a result of this effort, school attendance is way up.

Ms. Heybach brought up the fees the homeless kids have to pay that they cannot afford. She said that CPS students are overwhelmingly poor and the increasing number of participation fees is burdensome for people who cannot afford them, whether they are homeless or not. She also said that if people are not associated with a school, they get no services; yet, enrollment is still a problem for children in temporary living situations.

Representative La Via asked if there was a hotline number in Chicago for parents to call, and Ms. Dhupelia said that there was a parent support hotline number which is put out by the Local School Councils and the Parent Advisory Councils. Talk ensued about the best way to reach homeless parents and suggestions were offered to advertise opportunities for assistance on public transportation, in libraries, and in laundromats. The fact the Chicago Transportation Authority always charges for advertising, even that which is related to public services such as information about the start of the school year, was brought up as an example of the lack of inter-agency cooperation.

VI. Protocol for Recommendations to the General Assembly

Mr. Aranowski drew up a protocol for recommendations of the task force to the General Assembly that is aligned with the specific responsibilities the group as delineated in the joint resolution.

1. Identify different strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy and excessive absences epidemic in the City of Chicago.
2. Support community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in school and in their communities.
3. Promote ongoing professional development to equip school personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing factors to truancy and excessive absences.

The task force members were told they would receive the template for recommendations for action that day and that it was due back by close of business on Friday, May 2. Ms. Taylor stressed the importance of meeting this deadline in order to be able to discuss recommendations at the next meeting and to lay the groundwork for the Report Writing Committee to begin their work.

Michael Seelig addressed the fact that there should be some recognition of city-wide partnerships and public initiatives in Chicago such as job training programs and business relationships. He explained that because some older kids are disinterested in school and do not see a connection with the workforce, their attendance suffers. He said dual credit programs and work internships would provide advantages for these kids, but the participation of business leaders is essential.

Ms. Taylor said such a concept should be placed under Implications for Further Review in the recommendations template.

Questions were asked about offering a comprehensive set of best practices recognizing that some of them may not be financially feasible in the near future like having a nurse in every school to assist children who miss school frequently due to ongoing health issues.

Ms. Taylor said it is up to the task force to make recommendations and it is up to the members of the General Assembly to sponsor legislation and pass funding bills.

Representative LaVia said sometimes everything is not accomplished with one task force and said there may be a need for additional task forces in order to forge relationships with business or have more nurses employed in city schools. She said some of these things require ongoing conversations as this is an issue that is not going to be solved immediately. She went on to suggest that the task force reconvene periodically to gauge progress and inform legislators.

Jennifer Berne said we should be proactive and think of things that can really be moved and present our ideas as possible solutions.

Mr. Seelig said one thing we should discuss is whether we want to do a specific solution set versus building the capacity for constant inquiry. He said we have to be aware of how the landscape has changed because of school closings.

Ms. Taylor said the P-20 council put truancy on its agenda, and since this is a standing council, there will always be an effort to move this initiative forward.

Juliet Bromer asked about the process to sort the recommendations, if there is some merit to consensus building. She is interested in some discussion to narrow the field especially since she feels the task force should veer away from recommendations to criminalize parents for the students' absences. She also suggested the task force should propose definitions, not just say common definitions are needed. Mr. Aranowski said we should be specific about what language should be employed for standardized definitions.

Ms. Taylor said everyone should just put in what they feel are the best solutions, and on May 12 the members will have a chance to discuss what is in and what should be in. She cautioned that if something is important to a task force member, he or she should include it.

Representative Chapa LaVia advised the task force to keep it simple and make it a living document, something that provides an online resource for legislators to find more information.

Aarti Dhupelia asked in if there could be an emphasis in the recommendations template on high school as the number of absences doubles between eighth and ninth grades. Coincidentally, the task force members had been provided copies of a recent news story and editorial regarding efforts to address ninth grade absenteeism from the [Chicago Sun-Times](#). The newspaper story cited the results of a University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research study which extolled the effectiveness of attendance interventions provided to ninth graders at 20 CPS high schools and the editorial supported the expansion of this project to all city high schools as the interventions resulted in high graduation rates.

Leslie Juby said we should include an emphasis also on kindergarten, not just pre-kindergarten because pre-kindergarten is not mandated.

These two grade areas were specifically included in the recommendations template as these are levels at which absenteeism and truancy are most pronounced. Supports on these levels are different as there are different root causes; pre-kindergarten and kindergarten is a parent problem, and high school is the student's problem.

Kevin Walsh asked if all CPS schools are on board with the interventions for ninth graders, and Ms. Dhupelia said it is no longer just a policy, it is a practice. Principals are being held accountable, and they are seeing results. She said the article reflects a close partnership between the Consortium and CPS as they did the research and developed the metric many years ago. The network chiefs work closely with their principals they supervise and look at that metric, develop freshman watch lists and see how each freshman is doing, gather real time data, assemble attendance-specific reports, and develop personalized strategies.

Tangenese Porter, truancy coordinator for the Cook County Sheriff's Office, started a truancy initiative in the low-income suburbs of Posen and Robbins. She spoke about the problems with attendance recordkeeping and whether absences are considered excused or not. She looks for resources for people with problems that can be remedied by

social services and helps get parents the assistance they need. Ms. Porter explained that a lot of the kids on her list are now attending school, and she is waiting for results of exit surveys as formal data assessing the success of her initiative are due out soon. Early indicators show her project has been very successful.

Madelyn James commented on how we have to help schools understand the connection between chronic absenteeism and low achievement and provide supports as needed. Schools with good attendance rates post high achievement test scores. She wondered if chronic absenteeism is reported on school report cards.

Melissa Mitchell recalled the discussion that had occurred during another task force meeting about the revised state report cards and how chronic absenteeism was going to be reported. These report cards report the chronic truancy rate by school, students who have missed 5% or more school days without a valid excuse. (The chronic truancy rate on the City of Chicago 299 report card for 2013 was reported to be 31.9 %.)

Mr. Seelig said the task force needs to promote a core set of beliefs. He said whenever the subject of truancy comes up, many people conclude that it is the parents' fault. He explained that CPS is not taking a punitive stance and not treating kids like they are animals that have to be caught, but he stated that people may ask, "What is all this soft support stuff?" He said the task force should explain that they are introducing responsive systems, integrated community supports, and removing barriers rather than just be disciplinary in approach.

Mr. Aranowski said we have tried punitive measures for years, and they have not worked.

Mr. Seelig went on to say that the task force should be very thoughtful about the kinds of things to be done to lower the chronic absenteeism numbers, like not shaming or de-incentivizing principals. He said principals should be encouraged to provide a welcoming environment for kids, especially those children and teens who are in temporary living situations or coming out of the juvenile justice system, but if we focus solely on numbers this will not happen. Principals' numbers might take a bit of a hit if they welcome those kids in, so the task force should be mindful of this fact. "We de-incentivize them if we make lowering the (unexcused absence) numbers our priority because they will not extend themselves towards these kids. Their number one goal should be serving students, not a numbers goal." He said the numbers are productive numbers because they shine a light on where services need to be provided and should not serve to just put a red 'x' on a school.

Ms. Taylor echoed these sentiments and said the task force is going to avoid accusatory language and punitive measures and that the emphasis will be the application of supports in the community, in the home, and in the school.

VII. New Business/Open Discussion

Chairperson Taylor directed everyone to the contents of the folders which included a notice of a public hearing that had been held on February 2, 2013 on the west side, hosted by Representative La Shawn Ford, Representative Linda Chapa LaVia, and Ms. Taylor. She said she was aware that people have wondered about the community outreach that has occurred in order to query families about school attendance issues and disseminate information regarding services available for families. She said since the Chicago Tribune's series on truancy ran, much has been done to address the issue. Representative Chapa LaVia, Senator Jacqueline Collins, Senator Kimberly Lightford, Representative La Shawn Ford, and Alderman Emma Mitts have all been actively involved in community outreach and the search for solutions to absenteeism and truancy. Ms. Taylor praised the efforts of Senator Jacqueline Collins for her participation in the truancy solution effort and for her hosting duties at the public hearing that was to be held that evening.

A letter from President Cullerton and Speaker Madigan was also provided in the members' folders to serve as reminder that we are following necessary guidelines and protocols related to the mission of the task force to ensure the results are valid and sustainable. Ms. Taylor said she wants the conversation to be about the work and not anything else surrounding it in order that our recommendations are not faulted in any way.

Representative Chapa LaVia asked if CPS has eighth grade graduations, and it was acknowledged that most of the schools do. She said in Massachusetts, they did away with them because too many kids, especially in Hispanic communities, thought eighth grade graduation was a major milestone, and it affected high school attendance rates.

Representative Chapa La Via referenced the ongoing struggle she faces trying to incorporate children with special education and English language learning needs into the charter school community. She said she wants the charter schools to exist, but she has encountered difficulties with organizations that are pro-charter who perceive her efforts as running counter to their beliefs. She explained that she feels that “it is no longer about the child, it is about the success of the school, but that is not why schools were created. So it is important that we work hand in hand. I want the charter schools to be successful but I want them to succeed with all children and adhere to federal law.”

Representative Chapa La Via said when charters were introduced 20 years ago, they were allowed to have a lot of flexibility and some of them do a great job. She explained that when legislation is written, lawmakers do not include the charter statute as they just refer to districts. So, she explained, there has been a lot of ambiguity with regard to the charter school commission about what they had to do. Coupled with the fact that the charter school statute was written without consideration for certain specifics such as providing services to students with disabilities and English Language Learners, it is apparent that officials were not purposeful and intentional in their oversight when charter schools began operation.

Mr. Aranowski said that special education and ELL services are implicitly required by the state.

Representative Chapa La Via said it is not codified within the statute, so it is not forced upon them to change by their commission. She said some charters are doing well and are responsive to the communities they serve including those characterized by poverty or homelessness; whereupon, Eric Johnson said that if there are some doing well according to her assessment, he would like her to identify them for the benefit of INCS.

Representative Chapa La Via said we can do better to help them with resources. Some are set up for failure in some areas. She explained that when she met with some of them privately, she found that some felt like second class citizens because they do not get funded at the same rate as other schools by CPS, so they have to go to their other funding sources where they have to prove they are performing at a certain rate in order to get more money from investors. She said additionally some of these schools are being demonized and it is not fair because there are policies and practices they do not know about, like the state report card for example. She told CPS representatives to include in their recommendations something about charters to get them where they need to go.

Eric Johnson also brought up the CPS School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP*) which is CPS's policy for measuring annual school performance and is new for the 2013-2014 school year. He explained that the process by which many different parties including charter community unions, CPS, former educators, etc, came to this new performance has given him hope that even though something was not codified in SQRP, there is still an ongoing conversation amongst all of these parties, and it is important to keep that dialogue going, especially as it concerns different issues like truancy.

Ms. Dhupelia spoke about a new collaboration between CPS and INCS in the revision of the student code of conduct (suspensions and expulsions initiative in February), creating a new level of sharing and collaboration.

Ms. Heybach said charter schools fees are an issue. Regular schools charge fees, but they are able to be waived. Families that cannot afford things are entitled to a fee waiver process. Charter schools are allowed to charge ‘reasonable’ fees which are not defined anywhere.

Fanny Diego Alvarez brought up the fact that in the neighborhoods where there have been school closings, charter schools have opened to fill the gap. She expressed fear that if the charter schools are not compliant, are not servicing students properly, and not held to the same standards as public schools, that what the task force accomplished would not be implemented in the charter schools.

Representative Chapa La Via said the charters have agreed to partner with CPS and the task force.

Ms. Taylor said the charter schools were intentionally written into the resolution. She also explained that as an advisory body, INCS can help us with the red button issues, with the preventive and proactive measures developed by

the task force. Ms. Taylor also explained that INCS is aligned with charter school advisory bodies nationally which can drive further collaboration. She expressed her belief that because of the alliances formed, this task force has the potential to drive change that is actionable, sustainable, and doable – some to impact in the near future and some to have more long term effects. This task force will help a lot of people for a long time, especially those populations characterized by special needs, homelessness, or involvement in the juvenile justice system. The task force can be very intentional and explicit with regard to statute and regulation. The task force has the potential to have a huge impact because Chicago is such a major city and people are looking to see how we solve this problem.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

**The SQRP is a five-tiered performance system based on a broad range of indicators of success, including, but not limited to, student test score performance, student academic growth, closing of achievement gaps, school culture and climate, attendance, graduation, and preparation for post-graduation success. (Chicago Public Schools' website).*

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

May 12, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 2-025

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the April 28, 2014 Meeting
 - IV. Implications and Technical Assistance for Special Education
United States Department of Education - Office of Civil Rights
 - V. Implications and Recommendations for High Schools
University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research
 - VI. Task Force Recommendations Summary Debrief
 - VII. New Business/Open Discussion
 - VIII. Public Comment
 - IX. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



May 12, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

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

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

Chicago

Anna Alvarado
Jennifer Berne
Andrew Broy (Eric Johnson)
Rick Gravatt
Laurene Heybach
Leslie Juby
Melissa Mitchell
Antoinette Taylor
Dana Wright (Tangenese Porter)

Jeff Aranowski
Juliet Bromer
Aarti Dhupelia
Sarah Hains
Madelyn James
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Michael Seelig
Kevin Walsh
Jack Wuest

Springfield

Jackie Price

Arthur Sutton

Telephone

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Crystal Laura
Barbara Sherry
Maria Trejo

Mary Howard (Cassandra Thiem)
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Paul Sarvela

Not Present

Christine Boyd
Sen. Michael Connelly
Kevin Fahey
Laura Kieran
LaTanya McDade
Representative Sandi Pihos
Neli Vazquez Rowland

Senator Jacqueline Collins
Andrea Evans
Jim Kestner
Robert Lee
Kareem Pender
Theresa Plascencia
Elizabeth Swanson

III. Approval of Minutes from the April 28, 2014 Meeting

There was a motion to approve the minutes which was seconded and approved with no opposition.

IV. Implications and Technical Assistance for Special Education

United States Department of Education - Office of Civil Rights

Ms. Taylor expressed her gratitude to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and to the people involved in the chain of communication between Chicago and Washington D. C. for OCR's presence at the task force meeting to address issues related to students enrolled in Chicago Public Schools who have IEPs or 504 Plans and have school attendance problems.

Aleeza Strubel, supervisory attorney with OCR, said the agency does not have an official perspective on truancy but she wanted to provide the task force with specific information related to the needs of students with disabilities for application in school attendance solutions. Her intention was to give the task force an overview of the statutes which guarantee student rights and provide funding and to address the obligations of public schools to ensure students with disabilities get an education.

OCR enforces civil rights laws that prohibit recipients of federal financial assistance, such as a public school system, from engaging in discrimination based on any personal factor, including a disability, a perceived disability, or a history of a disability. There are two anti-discrimination statutes pertaining to the rights of disabled students: Section 504 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability by any school receiving federal financial assistance and the Americans with Disabilities Act which prohibits discrimination by any public entities. There is also the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which is a funding statute for special education programs for which her office does not provide oversight as that is provided by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

Ms. Strubel said her office has three means of addressing civil rights issues: complaint resolutions, compliance reviews, and technical assistance. She said there are about 600-700 civil rights complaints filed in Chicago in a year, usually by parents over issues related to their children's education. She explained further that compliance reviews are conducted when an issue is brought to their attention because of possible civil rights transgressions. For example, they launched a compliance review of CPS in 2010 over issues related to insufficient provision of transportation services for students with disabilities after being contacted by advocacy organizations. Her office also monitors the press and mines their own data for trends that are likely to spark complaints. OCR's third means of support to the public is technical assistance which they provide by responding to calls from parents and schools, presenting at conferences, and trying to bring schools and universities into compliance with the law. She explained that after OCR conducts an investigation and determines the extent of the legal oversight, they operate on a collaborative basis in order to bring institutions into compliance with the law and often negotiate voluntary service agreements. She cited the case of a Chicago charter school where a female student was being bullied because she was suffering from hair loss, and the school administration was unaware that this situation was in violation of federal statute. OCR worked with the school to address the issue.

Ms. Strubel explained that all schools have an obligation under the law to provide academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and related services to ensure the playing field is leveled for students with disabilities. Her office is additionally concerned with the access students with disabilities have on all other levels, from their ability to navigate the school property to their inclusion in extracurriculars. OCR also looks into the disproportional identification of students with disabilities from specific racial backgrounds as this has been an historic problem, and is

additionally concerned with disciplinary issues involving students with disabilities as there is a trend toward disability harassment.

It is not simply up to the parents to inform the district that their child has a disability; the district has an affirmative obligation to locate and identify students with disabilities who are not receiving a public education (Child Find). This is an area where truancy is a key factor. The district has to proactively make their policies and procedures known and make a reasonable effort toward finding failing and non-attending students. This includes examining and analyzing attendance and achievement statistics. Of the many tens of thousands of students who are truant, a fair number of them are students with disabilities who have yet to be identified as a student with a disability, have yet to receive services, or who have benefited neither from an evaluation nor from the knowledge of a special educational professional who could facilitate the access of these children to an education.

Teachers and administrators should heed red flags that indicate a student's need for an evaluation such as a lack of achievement, manifestation of chronic behavior problems, and/or chronic absenteeism. OCR usually comes in after the fact and asks why a district did not consider the student's absenteeism, decline in performance, or repeated behavior incidents as evidence of a child struggling and in need of an evaluation.

Parents may suspect a disability and raise it with the school, and the school must respond as school authorities cannot disregard a parent's request for an evaluation. Schools also have an obligation to inform parents of their due process rights in the event the parents wish to challenge the school's determination that an evaluation is not necessary or that special education services are not warranted after an evaluation takes place. Parents need to know what is available to them if they disagree with the school.

The obligation of a district is to provide FAPE which stands for a free, appropriate public education, and this constitutes much of OCR's caseload. A student with a disability is entitled to access to an education with whatever services and resources are needed to give the child an equal opportunity for an appropriate public education. That is regardless of the nature or the severity of the student's disability within a school district's jurisdiction. Even if children attend a parochial or other private school, they are entitled to FAPE from their district. OCR's purview includes what is considered to be "appropriate" because each child is different. Evaluation data will reveal what will or won't work, based on the individual child, but the driving factor is equal opportunity rather than outcome. "We are not saying every student should have the opportunity to get straight A's. We are saying they should have equal opportunity to a level playing field, to compete and participate, whether it is in a classroom or in an extracurricular activity," explained Ms. Strubel.

Rene Heybach asked about homeless children with disabilities and their right to immediate enrollment. She wondered if the evaluation process would be expedited for them. Ms. Strubel said that enrollment should never be held up pending an evaluation as the students should be in school. During the process, there would be stay-put provisions if everyone could agree what the child needs on an interim basis, pending the results of an evaluation and a full individualized assessment, but that the child should be enrolled in school right away and the process started. If a child was homeless and not enrolled in school, this should not be a basis for keeping him or her out as identification should occur immediately.

If the process is long because of the difficulty of the diagnosis, if there is a unique set of facts, or if it is difficult to determine what the child needs, the district would be expected to provide compensatory services in order to bridge the gap from the time a student enters and is evaluated to when the Individual Education Program (IEP – a plan to provide specialized instruction and services to enhance learning) or 504 plan (accommodation plan for a student with a disability that does not impact learning) is written up and implemented to make up for missed services. There are state laws about the length of the evaluation process time period. Compensatory services can be awarded if proper services were not provided or if there was a gap in the period of time from entry to evaluation to service provision.

One of the rights provided with Section 504, Title II of the ADA, and IDEA is the right to disagree with any individualized determination and file a due process complaint. If a child has an IEP because of a specific disability that affects his or her ability to achieve, he or she is covered under IDEA, and the parent would go to ISBE to file a due process complaint. Whereas if a child has diabetes or epilepsy, special education services are not necessary. The child may need assistance with glucose monitoring or insulin shots, however, so he or she will have a 504 plan. If a parent has a disagreement with what is in the plan or the district's implementation of the plan, the parent may file an internal due process complaint with CPS (or home district). A hearing officer will determine if the plan was appropriate and adequate for the child's needs and will order specific remedies for the child if the parent prevails.

A parent does not need a medical diagnosis to get a 504 plan started. They do have a right to request a plan and the district has the responsibility to respond. If a parent disagrees with the district's determination of need, the parent has the right to file a due process complaint.

Before IDEA was revised in 2008, there was much discussion over what qualified as a disability. Congress sent a message to loosen the standards to mitigate the arguments and debates over what qualifies. Since 2008, the student identified as having a disability has to "have a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities." An impairment is defined as "any physiological condition that affects a bodily system, or any mental or psychological disorder." Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, learning, seeing, etc. down to bodily functions.

Congress also eased the standards on what qualifies as a substantial limitation. Ms. Strubel said the theory is that we are looking at the opportunities for success, we are not looking for ways to deny children services. So the restriction does not have to be a complete inability in the area of a major life activity, but there has to be an impairment.

Ms. Strubel addressed the budgetary constraints in the provision of services to some students with specific needs and said OCR never accepts that as an excuse for not developing and implementing an appropriate plan for a student.

IDEA and 504 define disabilities differently. To be protected under IDEA, you must have a disability listed in IDEA and need special education and related services. Under 504, a qualified student with a disability is protected regardless of whether the student needs special education. Some students are entitled to both IDEA and 504, such as those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or oppositional defiant disorder. Parents should be present when either plan is being developed.

OCR has found that some students cannot get to school the same as their nondisabled peers, and transportation problems for students with disabilities in Chicago are huge. Social workers are spread out among a number of schools and students receive fifteen minutes of services in a month which compromises the effectiveness of that service and prompts an eventual provision of compensatory services if the matter is pursued by parents.

Ms. Taylor said when IEPs are developed, the team is mindful of costs and will not write in a service that is cost-prohibitive, especially if the parents are uninformed and not aware of their rights. Many parents perceive the school staff in the room are experts in the matter concerning their child and defer to their expertise.

Michael Seelig explained there is almost a disincentive to serve students with disabilities and English language learners and how the funding structure has recently been changed in California to address this issue.

Representative Chapa LaVia said Illinois legislators are working on a similar measure. She also said if schools take federal dollars, they better provide the services. If they have no intention of providing students with disabilities the services they need under the law, they should decline the special education funding. In view of decreased funding across the board for special education (formerly 40% from the federal government, currently at 17%), she advocates for equity in funding across the state so special needs students do not miss out on vital services.

Representative Chapa LaVia also referenced the ongoing problem with charter schools not providing adequate services to special needs and English language learners (ELL) populations but hastened to point out part of their problem is they receive only seventy cents on the dollar as compared to CPS schools. Ms. Strubel said her office is beginning to field more complaints from parents of students enrolled in charter schools and that they have planned mandatory trainings for all charter school principals and case managers in Chicago this June and July on the laws they are required to enforce. When OCR did research on charter schools, they couldn't find their Title IX coordinators or their 504 coordinators.

Melissa Mitchell asked about the process for a child's educational plan to follow if he moves, and Ms. Strubel said the plan follows child and schools either have to implement a plan from the other school or come up with their own.

Rene Heybach asked about the affirmative obligation to locate, identify, and enroll students with disabilities and the fact that in the city there is an ongoing battle about establishing residency when you are in a temporary living situation. She said no one seems to be trying to facilitate this situation. She said most homeless students experience delays in and barriers to enrollment. Ms. Strubel said districts are careful about enrollment because they do not want to pay for the education of a child from another district, but said her office is very aggressive in pursuing the rights of the homeless.

Jeff Aranowski said if there is an IEP or 504 plan component to a delayed enrollment situation for a child, they are definitely entitled to compensatory services. He asserted the problem for nondisabled children lies in the fact that Illinois law does not have a process for parents to appeal a district's refusal to enroll in the absence of suitable paperwork.

Ms. Strubel said her office responds immediately to complaints of this nature and drafts a resolution agreement with the district which is monitored very closely. She explained they also tell districts to reconvene their IEP teams for students with disabilities and consider the services the children need to close any gaps that exist, particularly if there was a time delay in enrollment.

Chairperson Taylor said this happens in the juvenile justice system where 504 plans and IEPs are not implemented. She said the reason the state has not seen more legal action around it is because the parents of students in this situation are probably unaware of their rights. Ms. Strubel advised members of the task force who advocate for children that they should alert parents to the fact that OCR can field their complaints. She said they have a rapid resolution process where they pick up the phone and call a school or district on behalf of a family and ask if officials know they will be on the hook for compensatory services.

Madelyn James asked about child find in the juvenile justice system because it would be likely that many of these teens would have learning or emotional/behavioral disorders.

Rick Gravatt said they look at records to see who has a disability because they are so aware of the correlation between students who have failed in school and the juvenile justice system. When necessary, they do an evaluation, but since most of their students are older, they do very little of these as most have plans already in place.

Ms. Strubel said a parent does not get to decide what the plan should be but they do have a voice. She also cautioned that no decision about special education can be made categorically because every child is different. You cannot place a child in a particular educational setting because of his or her disability. You could have twenty-five children with the same diagnosis, and you will not have twenty-five similar IEPs. Every 504 plan will also be different for children with the same medical situation such as diabetes because children handle their disease differently. She explained that once all the data is gathered on a child being considered for special education services, a team of people, including the parent is assembled for the discussion about placement. The parent may insist on things like a one-on-one aide or a certain assistive technology program and the district may decide to forgo those suggestions. Although the parent has a voice on the IEP team, the parent does not decide the plan. If the parent is dissatisfied with the IEP provisions, the parent has the right to file a complaint with ISBE. She said if they contacted her office to file a complaint, OCR would send the parents to ISBE because they are civil rights lawyers, not educators.

Often a team will decide on a plan and the principal will differ for reasons related to costs or personnel. Teams have to be careful about what they put in a plan because the federal government insists the IEPs be implemented as written.

Goal is inclusion because students with disabilities should be with their general education peers as much as possible. There are services provided on a pull-out and push-in basis. No child should be separated from their general education peers for the entirety of the school day. They should be included in a meaningful way in some general education classes

Ms. Strubel said charter schools need to improve their services to students with disabilities. She said they can only get better as they could not be worse. They need to educate their staffs on what has been written into law. Parents can file a complaint with her office if their child was

denied enrollment in a charter school because of a disability or if they were kicked out of a charter school because the school could not provide services.

Re-evaluation of a student should occur when teachers see declining achievement and increased absenteeism. Reconvening the IEP team helps in the provision of appropriate services when need changes and gives parents due process rights, the right to contest the placement decision. Re-evaluation also occurs on a planned basis every three years.

Ms. Strubel explained you can discipline students with disabilities, but if you discipline a student with a disability for ten days, that constitutes a significant change in placement which triggers a need for re-evaluation. The same is true if there is a pattern to the discipline of the child. A manifestation determination hearing must be held to determine if the student's behavior which inhibits his/her progress is a manifestation of the disability. You must address the behaviors because you cannot punish a child for his or her disability.

Some parents complain that their child's placement was predetermined, which is not an acceptable process. Many times it is a resource problem because you have a case manager with a docket of kids. OCR does not accept that nor do they accept placements made out of administrative convenience. Vaguely worded plans are a problem also because no one knows what the child is entitled to. OCR will look at the plan itself when parents complain. They also look at meeting notes and interview team members to try and get to an understanding of what the plan requires. District and school staffs must be trained to write plans clearly so there can be no room for ambiguity. Procedural safeguards must also be clearly written to be understood.

If a child has an aide in school, he or she may need one for extracurricular activities. It is important to remember aides and services in the extracurricular context and give students with disabilities an opportunity to participate.

Representative Chapa LaVia referred to House Bill 4527 which she sponsored (which amends the Charter Schools Law of the School Code and requires a charter school to comply with all federal and State laws and rules applicable to public schools that pertain to special education and the instruction of English language learners) and referenced INCS's opposition to it. The bill was brought on by the U. S. Department of Education because of the things that were not codified in the Charter School Statute. She said that they are on top of the charter schools because they are not doing what they are supposed to do for students with disabilities and English language learners, but it is because their statute does not say they should.

Mr. Aranowski said the addition of special education and bilingual instruction is almost declaratory in nature. He said it might not be in their Charter School Code, but these services must be offered in view of federal statutes obligating federal funding recipients to structure programs to serve these student groups.

Ms. Strubel said when these complaints come in, they go after CPS because it is their funding that is on the line as the charter schools come under their umbrella in Chicago. Representative Chapa La Via pointed out to CPS that they could be stripped of their funding because the charter schools aren't doing what they should to serve these student groups, and the charter schools operate under a code that doesn't mandate it. She said the charters think she is jumping all over them for no reason. She said some charters are trying to provide services, but most aren't.

Ms. Strubel said guidance is coming out next week because this is a problem with most charter schools. She said that in all fairness, the charters have never said to OCR that they didn't have to comply. She said OCR has provided training to some charters schools. It is really about awareness and understanding; they are not saying federal statutes do not apply to them. Eric Johnson of INCS likes the idea of collaboration rather than legislation which prompted Representative Chapa LaVia to ask why the charters are opposed to the new bill (which has since passed both Houses and was signed into law by Governor Quinn on June 9.

OCR is coming out with a brief about greater charter school cooperation because this is a problem with charter schools nationally.

V. Implications and Recommendations for High Schools

University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research

Stacy Ehrlich, Eliza Moeller, and Rachel Steele of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) were present to share an overview of the consortium's study which focused on the long term effects of interventions at the ninth grade level to stem absenteeism and truancy and thereby increase graduation rates. They displayed a graph which depicted the level of chronic absenteeism (missing 10% or more of school days for any reason) from pre-kindergarten through senior year of high school during the 2011-2012 school year. Their focus is the huge jump in absenteeism between eighth and ninth grades.

Absences are highly related to key outcomes for students as there is a tight link between going to class and grades, test scores, and graduation rates. They have found ninth grade is a really pivotal year. Another graph demonstrated the connection between absences and grades among a group of students who had all scored a 16 on the eighth grade EXPLORE test. In ninth grade, the students who attended school with minimal absences (five or fewer days) had 3.0 grade point averages (GPAs) while those with attendance problems had averages that fell in relationship to the number of school days missed. As a result, students who had missed twenty or more school days had a 1.8 GPA, a situation which affected 23% of the students in this cohort.

Once the link was established between non-attendance and failure, the researchers wanted to be able to predict who was going to fail by examining different data. Their examination of demographic and economic background characteristics led to the conclusion these factors were responsible for only 7% of course failures and eighth grade test scores accounted for only another 5%. Student behaviors were found to be the greatest predictor of failure 61% of the time during this study because when students choose to neither attend school nor make any effort toward achievement, they fail.

Another slide demonstrated the relationship between school attendance and graduation rates. Students who missed four or fewer days in ninth grade had an 87% graduation rate. As attendance rates diminished, so too did the graduation rates. Student who missed five to nine days, graduated at a rate of 63%, those who missed ten to fourteen days had a 41% graduation rate, and the remainder had graduation rates in direct proportion to their attendance habits.

The same students had many more unexcused absences in ninth grade than in eighth grade (3.7 days versus 12.1 days). Total absences – for all reasons – nearly doubled from 8.4 days in eighth grade to 16.5 days in ninth grade for this same group of students in the studied cohort.

Questions were raised about the possibility of the ninth grade data actually reflecting a number of students who failed to transition from elementary school to high school, and Stacy Ehrlich said CPS is really stringent about the transition process. Aarti Dhupelia explained there is a transfer verification process within CPS but that it does happen occasionally that a student will not show up at the anticipated high school and enrolls in a different high in or out of the district.

Rene Heybach reported that as many as 300 homeless students are identified as unable to be located.

Ms. Ehrlich said the overwhelming bulk of the problem is, in terms of the numbers of kids who are chronically absent and setting themselves up not to graduate, is not due to homelessness or any other severe social problem; it is from the transition to high school and the fact that some students become disengaged and attend school sporadically. If you want to find the best time to intervene, it is in that moment when kids are becoming acclimated to high school.

Some of the reasons for increased absences in ninth grade include the following situations:

- Getting to school on time
 - Transportation issues
 - Waking up on time
- Safety concerns
- Increased suspensions
- High school context

Students report their biggest adjustment to high school stems from the last bulleted item as they find the switch from constant teacher monitoring on the elementary school level to the relative freedom of high school to be disconcerting. In eighth grade, teachers organize the whole learning process for their students, whereas in ninth grade the teacher delivers course content and gives students a tremendous amount of responsibility. Teachers have an expectation of self-reliance in their students among whom self-reliance varies greatly.

Classroom factors are also relevant as some teachers have more students absent than others do as students pick and choose whose class they will attend. Students tend not to miss classes in the middle of the school day, classes that are smaller in size, and classes with high-achieving peers.

Schools with more supportive environments with a high degree of teacher support and student/teacher trust elicit better attendance numbers.

School attendance would be improved if there was someone on staff who could coordinate issues related to health care, transportation, and safety. Ms. Ehrlich explained that the most successful high schools organize themselves around data and seek solutions through thorough data analysis, particularly in ninth grade when students need to be monitored and supported.

CCSR's Eliza Moeller heads up the Data Practice Collaborative to help high schools diagnose and solve their own problems through data collection and analysis. She explained that tracking district attendance data and disseminating it in a timely way is a best practice and that the data should be easy for teachers to access and should be focused on the right indicators: attendance and grades.

Such data will dissuade an algebra teacher from automatically sending students with poor grades to tutoring. The data would enable the teacher to look at who is in the building, who is not, and who is not attending class. The more teachers are able to engage in that kind of problem-solving, the more they will realize a tutoring intervention is only appropriate for a small number of kids, the kids who are present every day but not mastering the content.

They found in some high schools there was an intentional reorganization to create teams of teachers across departments to discuss student progress/attendance and consider solutions when either diminishes. This collaboration is necessary in view of the fact a ninth grader is likely not to ask for help. Most high schools are not organized to foster the discussions about why students are not in class, and Ms. Moeller said fourteen year olds are persistently adolescent. She said they have been studying ninth graders for twenty-five years at CCSR, and the one thing that does not change is the nature of fourteen year olds.

Ms. Moeller said the attendance issue is like an onion with layers of causes: family issues, chronic illness of parents or children, community violence, etc. She said you can peel all the layers away of all those endemic, hard to solve problems until you come to this really large center which is fourteen year olds who need more supports to get on the right track in high school.

When Rachel Steele, a data strategist at CCSR, began working at Hancock High School to pilot the ninth grade intervention program, she discovered many facets to their attendance problems. Students were missing for the whole day or part of the day, they were skipping out on first and last period classes, they were trying to avoid teachers who were less than engaging, or they had no interest in an assigned class. She found also that staff was laboring under the misconception that last period classes were cut because the scheduling conflicted with the times students had to report to their after school jobs. Upon investigation it was discovered only 12% had jobs and of those, only 8% of those with jobs had a work schedule that interfered with school.

The researchers said there was some lag time (two days) on data on whether a student cut one class or was out all day. The reason for this was cited as a complication of CPS's multiple data tracking programs under their IMPACT system (SIM, Dashboard, VERIFY, etc.) which do not align as each features different calculations. Ms. Dhupelia said CPS is working to streamline and align these data systems.

Ms. Dhupelia also explained the CPS student code of conduct, which is revised every other year, will offer a plan for a reduction in suspensions and expulsions, and professional development will be provided to staff on alternatives to suspension and expulsion.

Ms. Steele said school administrators and teachers need technical solutions to problems but also need adaptive solutions to problems. The technical solutions are a lot easier than adaptive solutions but schools have to make it part of the school culture to, for example, make calls home every day. She said timely parent notification calls have a positive effect on attendance. She said schools have to change the way they are doing things in response to student situations.

Representative Chapa LaVia said charters are good at doing that. They actually have people who go out to the homes and bring the kids in.

Ms. Taylor said it is not always about pouring more money into a situation but being more aware of what is happening in the building and diffusing data results across the learning environment so everyone is talking about attendance.

Eliza Moeller advised that school districts need not purchase a program for attendance solutions. She said you have to spend some time figuring out what your attendance problem is like Rachel Steele did at Hancock High School. A school may need extra resources to fund the cost of having people go to absent students' homes. The priority is to reorganize your ideas on the role of the high school in the lives of adolescents. Solutions start from and stem from data diagnostics and problem solving.

Jack Wuest asked about the process for culture change at a school.

Ms. Steele said Hancock had been awarded a school improvement grant and chose to partner with the University of Chicago. CCSR sent in a team of consultants including Ms Steele who was the project manager. They formed a leadership team which consisted of the school administration and the leaders of every department in the school (special education, course leads, grade level leads, etc.). They met on a weekly basis during the first year to review the data in order to understand what was really going on in the school. During the second year, they began to try out different strategies and during year three they began to work to achieve sustainability. Ms. Steele has made sure school staff is able to run the programs on their own and maintain the data gathering and analysis cycle.

Ms. Moeller explained that if someone can initiate this on-the-ground problem solving, work on aligning the data systems, get people asking the right questions in order to understand their own problems, and then seek solutions, real change can be achieved with the freshman on track movement. People on the ground have to be empowered to be problem-solvers.

Melissa Mitchell said that community partners are important because they have very different relationships with families and students and have knowledge of what resources may be available, and Ms. Moeller concurred.

VI. Task Force Recommendations Summary Debrief

Ms. Taylor referred everyone to the task force recommendations summary and asked members to review the document and make sure their individual recommendations were included. If they wished to insert additional recommendations into the document, they should highlight their addition and reference the page number in an email to the task force manager by May 16.

Jeff Aranowski asked if members could indicate which recommendations they are opposed to and Ms. Taylor said such selections should also be highlighted with an explanation offered. When we come together in June, we will look at a draft of the report by the writing committee.

Ms. Taylor thanked the members of the Best Practice Committee for their contributions to the task force as each member read and summarized at least one of the studies and reports on truancy solutions across the country. She also expressed her gratitude to the members of the Public Hearing Committee who attended hearings during the evening and on a Saturday in order to receive comments and survey community members on truancy issues.

VII. New Business/Open Discussion

Aarti Dhupelia introduced Dr. Zakieh Mohammed, Senior Manager in Attendance and Truancy at CPS.

VIII. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:03 p.m.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

June 19, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 2-025

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the May 12, 2014 Meeting
 - IV. Public Hearings Debrief
 - V. Focus Group Debrief
 - VI. Facilitated Discussion of Recommendations to the General Assembly
 - VII. New Business/Open Discussion
 - VIII. Old Business/Open Discussion
 - IX. Public Comment
 - X. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



June 19, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Technical difficulties with the video-teleconference equipment caused the meeting to be called to order well past the 10:00 a.m. start time, at 10:20 a.m.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

Chicago

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Jennifer Berne
Andrew Broy (Eric Johnson)
Rick Gravatt
Laurene Heybach
Madelyn James
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Michael Seelig
Dana Wright (Tangenise Porter)

Jeff Aranowski
Juliet Bromer
Aarti Dhupelia
Sarah Hains
Mary Howard (Cassandra Thiem)
Leslie Juby
Melissa Mitchell
Antoinette Taylor

Springfield

Arthur Sutton (Richard Tapia)

Telephone

Jennifer Berne
Andrea Evans

Senator Jacqueline Collins
Paul Sarvela

Not Present

Anna Alvarado
Sen. Michael Connelly
Jim Kestner
Crystal Laura
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Kareem Pender
Theresa Plascencia
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Elizabeth Swanson
Kevin Walsh

Christine Boyd
Kevin Fahey
Laura Kieran
Robert Lee
LaTanya McDade
Representative Sandi Pihos
Jackie Price
Barbara Sherry
Maria Trejo
Jack Wuest

III. Approval of Minutes from the May 12, 2014 Meeting

The minutes were approved and seconded.

IV. Public Hearings Debrief

Jeff Aranowski provided a summary of the results of the parent surveys which were completed by parents at the public forums which were held in three locations across the city. More than half (57%) were familiar with the attendance policy at their children's schools and CPS, and slightly more than half (52%) knew the truancy policy. Eighty-six percent (86%) knew what constituted an excused and an unexcused absence at their children's schools.

On the survey parents were asked what suggestions they had regarding attendance and truancy that they would like the Task Force to recommend to the General Assembly. One of the most common themes in the parent responses was in the reinstitution of truant officers. Another frequent theme was the need to strengthen school/parent communications and partnerships. Another very common theme was the concept of parental accountability as parents felt the district and schools had to do their part but that responsibility extends to parents as well since, as one parent stated, "Good behaviors start in the home."

Some of the common responses to a question regarding the barriers children face in enrolling, attending, and staying in school included bullying and peer to peer relationships while student safety was also cited by many respondents. Student mobility and homelessness were also seen as barriers to school attendance.

Several common themes emerged when parents were asked what else the Task Force needed to know about attendance and truancy in community schools. Homelessness was cited as something that merits closer attention especially as it affects the transportation needs of children whose families are in temporary living situations. Transportation in general was mentioned frequently especially as many neighborhood schools have closed and CPS is not required to provide transportation to a majority of their students, mainly just the homeless and some students with disabilities.

Mr. Aranowski commented that many steps likely to be taken to reduce truancy will have the effect of providing relief in other areas of school for students. If you have comprehensive school and district transformation, you are going to see a reduction in bullying and improved achievement for students, among many other things.

Juliet Bromer asked if Mr. Aranowski could indicate some demographics of the respondents. He said he had no way of knowing that as the survey was not scientific and respondents were not asked for those details. He did say the people who attended the public hearings where most of the surveys were completed were parents of students and some representatives from community organizations. He explained the risk you undertake in holding public hearings, is that the people who attend are the most informed as indicated by their presence at the function. Based on the discussions that occurred at the public hearings, he felt the information they gathered was from the ground level, in the trenches, so to speak.

Rene Heybach said that not everyone had a chance to speak because of the size of the crowd, particularly at the hearing which was held on the southeast side of the city at Pilgrim Baptist Church of South Chicago at 91st and Brandon on Saturday, May 3.

Ms. Taylor said she and several other task force members made it a point to stay well after the meeting ended to listen and take note of the comments voiced by those who were not heard during the meeting.

Mr. Aranowski asked that Task Force members keep the results of this survey in mind as they filter through the recommendations to the General Assembly so the Task Force would be responsive to the parents who participated in the public hearing process and survey.

Aarti Dhupelia asked if he could break down some of the parents' responses to more specific components regarding parental accountability. Mr. Aranowski said many people suggested parents become more involved in their children's schools while others thought a law should be passed restricting public aid to parents who send their children to school. Others suggested parent education forums on the importance of school attendance not only for their own children but for the betterment of the community at large.

V. Focus Group Debrief

Madelyn James presented the results of the Family Focus Group which she chaired on May 12. The demographics of the eight participants included the following factors: six Blacks and two Hispanics, two males and six females, parents of children between the ages of six and eighteen, and six participants who had children currently enrolled in CPS or Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) schools. Of the eight people, five turned in surveys; of these five, three were completed.

Among the three parents who completed the survey, only one knew the CPS attendance policy, but two knew the CPS truancy policy. All three who completed the survey knew what constituted both an excused and an unexcused absence while only one knew who to contact with a question about enrollment and attendance. When asked for suggestions for recommendations to the General Assembly, one respondent said truancy officers should be utilized.

During a group discussion with the Parent Focus Group participants, the parents of current students said they knew what the attendance policies were. An AUSL parent said he/she polled twenty-five other parents and found none of them knew what the school policies related to attendance, truancy, and code of conduct are. A CPS parent said the only time parents receive a copy of the CPS attendance policy is when children are enrolled in school.

Ms. Taylor stated that although some people said they knew the attendance policy of their school, when asked for deeper information regarding the policy those same people referenced their school's average daily attendance rate. One parent stated, "Our school's attendance policy is supposed to be 94%," therefore, suggesting that when parents or guardians discuss the attendance policy they are actually referencing the attendance rate. Most parents also stated that attendance is rarely discussed after September unless a student becomes a problem or if someone transfers to the school.

When asked to articulate the CPS truancy policy, one parent responded that a student could be absent eight or fewer times, but the ninth absence would trigger disciplinary action. One parent volunteered that three instances of tardiness constitute an absence. Excused absences were understood to involve a sick child, a funeral, or a family emergency.

Suggestions for the Task Force to present to the General Assembly included truancy officers and student support services representatives to help with transportation housing, and more accessible communication. Other parents suggested a statewide truancy office that operates independently of school districts.

Barriers to enrollment and attendance include the fact that parents do not get an access code to the parent portal until the first report card pick-up, some parents do not have access to the internet, and some parents have limited computer skills and do not know how to use the portal. Parents also cited an overall lack of communication and the fact that many parents feel disrespected in the schools and find it difficult to get straightforward answers.

The last question asked of the parents was relative to what they wanted the Task Force to know about attendance and truancy in their neighborhood schools. The answers included deficits in parental literacy, parents' lack of trust in CPS, the tendency to treat the children as commodities or 'seats.' Parents additionally advocated for 'peace centers' where students could go to as needed, holding administrators responsible for the 'educational neglect' of students, staff training on truancy policy, common statewide measures, and a welcome packet of information from ISBE at strategic grade levels (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and ninth grade).

Juliet Bromer is engaged in a leadership development project in North Lawndale with parents and has found that literacy issues are huge among parents who can only read at early elementary levels. She wondered if parents could even read any informational packets should ISBE or CPS provide them. She also said parents do not have accessibility to schools and therefore have less of an opportunity to learn how to engage school personnel, witness how school personnel elicit good behaviors from children, and find it difficult to advocate for their children.

Melissa Mitchell said she was in a Palatine district where the parents speak seventy-one different languages and they work with different groups of parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds to create handbooks in parents' native languages.

Fanny Diego Alvarez brought up security issues at schools as reason parents do not have accessibility which severely impacts parental engagement. She said school culture varies widely from school to school.

Mr. Aranowski said another task force is being created that is going to look at school safety and security standards. He said this is a difficult area to negotiate. On the one hand, you want your school to be a safe environment for your children, but on the other hand you do not want it closed off to the community.

Rene Heybach said you have to know your families in order to open the school doors. Ms. Heybach also said that all the printed materials people get at the beginning of the school is too much, that parents don't read it all. There is no substitute for people talking to one another. When you talk to people they understand what you are talking about.

Ms. Alvarez brought up the fact that suitable identification is hard to get for parents who either lack the money to pay the fee or are undocumented.

Ms. Taylor thanked Mr. Aranowski and Ms. James for their summary reviews of the public hearing and parent focus group outcomes. She added a concern she heard voiced by many parents that schools are not very timely in reporting attendance data to parents when a child has missed a particular class or a portion or all of the school day. Ms. Taylor also explained that parents are

unaware that the mandatory school attendance age has been lowered to six years of age. She advised that the state pursue an effort to communicate this change in the law by enlisting the cooperation of the Chicago Public Library and the Secretary of State's office.

Rene Heybach brought up the state figures on truancy which had been distributed to task force members via email and a hard copy in their folders. She wanted clarification on the numbers provided for the number of truants by gender for the 2012-2013 school year as the numbers for CPS were extremely high (181,252 for boys and 176,052 for girls). Mr. Aranowski explained that these were instances of truancy, or any unexcused absence from just one class. He then explained that the middle set of numbers (61,724 for boys and 58,050 for girls) identified the number of students who missed 5% or more of school days. The final group of numbers (86 for boys and 55 for girls) indicates the number of schools with truant minors. Task force members were concerned about the first set of numbers because that number would mean that 90% of CPS students had at least one instance of being truant. The chronic truancy numbers would indicate that nearly one-third of CPS students were chronically truant, missing 5% or more of their school days. Mr. Aranowski said he would clarify these numbers at the next meeting.

VI. Facilitated Discussion of Recommendations to the General Assembly

Ms. Taylor referred to the 2010-2011 school year as that is what was referenced in the Chicago Tribune article and explained that contrary to what some people thought, that school year with its high truancy numbers was not an anomaly. Ms. Taylor backed this statement up by briefly discussing the Illinois State Board of Education's analysis report from the 2012-2013 school year that lists 119,774 students from Chicago Public Schools as chronic truants. This is roughly one-fourth of the district's student population. She reminded everyone that on December 6 at the first meeting, there was a discussion of what constituted the definition of attendance at school and reminded the task force that there is still not a consensus on that. She said that on February 28, at the third meeting, Leslie Juby had asked for CPS's administrative policy, and as of the date of that meeting, June 19, the task force had still not received that policy. She said that she was not saying the policy does not exist, but that it was not readily available and if it is not available administratively, how is it available on the building, parent, or student levels? At the very minimum, this is something that probably should be addressed at the state level

Ms. Taylor introduced Sue Horan, an educational consultant, who was trained on National School Reform and Critical Friends Group protocols who was asked to facilitate the discussion of the recommendations to the Chicago Public Schools, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the General Assembly. She explained that if members of the task force consider a particular action important enough, they shouldn't worry about cost.

Ms. Horan said that in order to facilitate the discussion of recommendations, she advised the use of the small group model, a process that would enable the expression of multiple points of view in response to strategic questions. She directed the groups to consider the three separate responsibility areas within the document and consider what should be included, what should not be included, and what should be amended or changed. Representatives from each group posted their favored recommendations on a series of poster sheets on the wall.

As the group reassembled, Ms. Horan asked for the common themes, surprising elements, and the most important issues identified by the groups.

Ms. Dhupelia identified parent engagement as a common theme, the need to make parent engagement tactics part of professional development with current staff and to incorporate an understanding of these tactics part of university preparation programs for teachers and administrators. Another common theme identified by Ms. Dhupelia was the necessity of forming and/or enhancing partnerships with community-based organizations. A third area of emphasis is data tracking and early warning indicator systems as well as quarterly and annual reporting to create more accountability for schools and districts. Data sharing across organizations also came up often as community-based organizations could use that information to support their work with families. She said transportation came up several times, particularly for several priority groups, but since it is a cost issue there are no easy answers.

Melissa Mitchell indicated the need for coordination - of efforts, of data, of schools and community organizations, and of teacher preparation programs - to address the underlying causes of absenteeism and truancy. She said there is a lot of policy in place already, but there is now opportunity to strengthen policy and strengthen practice around policy. She thinks it would be beneficial in the report to the General Assembly if recommendations for policy changes are listed with current policies so the differences would be apparent. Things might be more actionable if ISBE and/or the General Assembly can see the differences and what needs to be amended.

Mr. Aranowski wanted to interject that he doesn't think we need to add more data systems but to improve the ones currently being utilized. Once you have the data, what you do with it is important. He said CPS has too much data which is almost worse than having no data at all.

Ms. Mitchell said the longitudinal data collection system would be great and then discussion would need to occur about how to access that data.

Michael Seelig said all pieces of data have to be coordinated and examined through a strong cycle of inquiry in order to inform best practice; otherwise, it is just data. He said we need to guide schools to use the data to inform best practice for their specific situations and help them with implementation through professional development either from ISBE or from the CPS central office.

Mr. Aranowski said some of the directives for ISBE were misplaced and there are things the state cannot do without legislation. ISBE provides guidance about what is best practice and is very careful about mandating change. Some things have to come from the district.

Ms. Horan asked how do you decide what is practice and what is procedure and how can some of the recommendations be collapsed?

Juliet Bromer addressed the fact there is a lot of redundancy among the recommendations, and many things are said at different levels of specificity, but they are all saying the same thing which makes it really hard to sort through. You might find the same recommendation under procedure, practice, and policy. She said some recommendations are so broad and vague such as, "Schools should be welcoming." There should be more specificity to the recommendations in order to be prescriptive.

Mr. Aranowski agreed that the range of recommendations included many that were very broad and some which were overly detailed and asked if there were some things people absolutely did not want in.

Responses included the determination that some things were great ideas but were not really prescriptive to truancy issues as the task force needs to focus on moving the needle on this issue to come up with actionable items that can produce measurable data.

Professional development on absenteeism data on a quarterly basis was criticized as excessive as teachers already feel they have too much professional development and this time could be used to introduce other related items such as how to use the data.

Ms. Mitchell said the term *truancy officer* needs to be redefined to be a person who can support the students and the family and connect them to resources so they can overcome barriers to attendance. She is not comfortable with the term *truancy officer* as it does not incorporate all the roles this person must play.

Mr. Aranowski asked why CPS eliminated truancy officers.

Ms. Dhupelia said the positions were eliminated partly because of budgetary issues and partly because there was little evidence of effectiveness. She said you have to get to the root causes of why a student is absent and that may take a social worker or a psychologist; it might also be a physical health problem that needs to be addressed. She said there is still a function of outreach that occurs in different ways in different schools, and sometimes at a regional level there will be efforts toward reengagement. She said CPS has tried to balance outreach and the provision of services. She thinks the recommendations for CPS to hire specific personnel are too specific and granular because there should be strategies and practices in place that address the root causes of absenteeism which may mean to work with a non-profit partner or a social worker. Instead of hiring truancy officers, Ms. Dhupelia explained, there is a need to use our resources better and address strategies and functions better.

Tangenise Porter, in attendance for Dana Wright of the Cook County Sheriff's Department, addressed the task force and reminded them of her function within the Department as the truancy coordinator. She is a member of law enforcement with a background in psychology who calls on truant students and their families. She said she is in a position to respond to families' needs because of her background and is able to research solutions and connect them with the appropriate resources. As an officer, she also can use the knowledge she acquires from her fellow officers as leverage in a non-adversarial way. There is some extra weight attached when you receive a visit from law enforcement, but the sheriff has tried to make it more about social service rather than a law enforcement thing, she explained.

Rene Heybach said she understands Ms. Dhupelia's point about how the hiring of additional personnel doesn't necessarily solve the problem, but the thing that is hard about working with families is finding someone who will respond to them. She explained that callers to the CPS hotline do not get assistance especially since the hotline is not always functioning. At some point, they need to feel that someone has heard them and someone is responding. She said we can collect all the data we want, but if we are not delivering something concrete back to the families, we lose them. "So we can think in these long arcs about policies and practices, if we don't offer something in the moment that matters, we have lost that moment. That moment of crisis is a transforming moment. It is transforming for the allegedly abusive or neglectful parent. Are we missing those moments?" Ms. Heybach explained that if they are reaching out because they have a problem and if someone like Tangenise Porter shows up and responds to their problems, they stand a better chance of becoming engaged.

Ms. Dhupelia responded that we have to figure out a really seamless integration of services, so as we find out about issues, we can determine where people can be referred to.

Ms. Heybach said in seeking to identify all the services for homeless youth when working with community-based organizations, she found there was no one to take them from the school to the service. Something huge was missing. There is no transportation for that purpose, and there is no person to do that.

Ms. James asked if members of the writing team were present. She was told yes and that they were going to meet on June 27 and all members of the task force would receive an agenda and an emailed notice of the meeting as it was open to all. She wanted to know if the members of the writing committee have a framework to work with and if punitive measures were going to be included in the report to the General Assembly. She did not think we had sufficiently discussed the recommendations for the writing to begin.

Ms. Heybach said one idea she wanted incorporated is the fact schools belong to the families and wanted specifics in the report about making them more responsive to the families.

Since several people have alluded to their distaste for punitive measures, Mr. Aranowski asked if anyone wanted punitive measures. No one articulated their preference for such measures then or in the recommendations made to the task force.

Ms. James said there was no group consensus about whether families' benefits should be cut if their children do not attend school. She said we never got to the point of saying we should be supportive of families, supportive of schools. She said we need a framework of what we believe to be best practices.

Ms. Heybach asked if Ms. James would like to summarize those principles for the framework of the report.

Juliet Bromer said the recommendations are organized around three responsibilities in four areas but she wondered if it should be organized around topics such as family engagement or school/family collaboration, data, or any of the main principles the task force discussed; otherwise the same ideas are going to pop up in individual recommendations over and over again.

Mr. Aranowski reminded everyone that the responsibilities came out of the resolution.

Ms. Taylor explained the writing committee will provide the task force with a draft before the July meeting so everyone will have a chance review and edit it. People will have the opportunity to make suggestions. The writing committee will work together to draft a cohesive document.

Mr. Seelig said the report will shine a light on need and removing barriers

VII. New Business/Open Discussion

Before the meeting was adjourned, Ms. Dhupelia said she wanted to make comments pertaining to a document she provided which was a draft of the CPS strategy for improving attendance and preventing truancy.

Ms. Taylor read from a prepared statement before yielding the floor to Ms. Dhupelia. She said CPS “was sharing a draft of something that was internal to the Chicago Public Schools system, that the review of the draft should not be seen as acceptance of the document as a whole. The task force does not represent an authoritative voice on this document and any feedback coming from members of the task force does not represent any organization appointed to this task force. It had previously been shared with me and forwarded to Senator Collins and Representative Chapa LaVia and the only suggestion coming from us was for CPS to be in touch with ISBE to work in tandem with any guidelines they may have and to be in touch with the Illinois Association of School Boards to find out if there are any guiding documents or templates they are using with other districts. Jeff Aranowski provided a contact for Aarti Dhupelia at the Illinois Association of School Boards. We are not aware what or if any follow-up occurred. In reference to any members of the press or public who may be present in person or via telephone, the task force holds no responsibility for the sharing of this document by anyone at any time after this meeting concludes.”

Ms. Dhupelia said tackling their attendance and truancy issues is a top priority. CPS absolutely recognizes that the numbers for attendance, chronic absence, and chronic truancy are not where they want them to be. Ms. Dhupelia said CPS acknowledges that but over the last few months they have made very intentional strides to act on it, particularly by developing a draft of an attendance and truancy plan and piloting aspects of the plan this year which they intend to strengthen, based on input they received. Ms. Dhupelia was hopeful that task force members would see a lot of alignment with the things the task force had been talking about, but there are areas CPS needs to develop more. She would like the opportunity to talk with people about it and she welcomes comments and feedback. She said the plan does include definitions that had been agreed on with regard to absences, truancy, etc. She also said at the next meeting, CPS wants to share their attendance, absence, and truancy data which they are in the process of cleaning up and refining since school just ended. They expect an improvement in the numbers due to the intentional efforts that they made this year, and they hope to further strengthen it with the feedback of the task force. She added that the plan explored the elementary trends in particular and CPS agrees that improvements need to be made and some have been made at the high school level. One is the intentional freshman on-track work which has really been driving improvements with regard to attendance and grades. CPS has launched significant efforts around supportive practices in greater magnitudes at the high school level and has changed disciplinary tactics. They have reduced suspensions and expulsions and are looking to make these improvements at the elementary level insofar as declining suspensions and improving attendance are concerned.

VIII. Old Business/Open Discussion

Ms. Taylor thanked everyone for their contributions and said she wants the work of the task force to continue its life in Springfield.

She additionally reminded everyone on the task force to be mindful of the email they received pertaining to their completion of new ethics requirements since the last meeting of the task force falls within a new fiscal year.

IX. Public Comment

Sergio Hernandez of the Illinois Early Childhood Fellowship thanked the task force for tackling the complex issues of absenteeism and truancy. He said, “We talk about budgetary constraints but we

have to remember not to lose those moments when we can really help students and families. All it takes is for people in the building to reach out and help families. Some professionals do not trust the ability of parents to really collaborate. LSCs work in varying degrees in different communities. We have to engage them more and all community stakeholders who volunteer their time

The senior manager of attendance and truancy for CPS, Dr. Zakieh Mohammed, was present also.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force

Meeting Agenda

July 14, 2014

10:00 a.m.

James R. Thompson Center

100 West Randolph Street

Room 2-025

Chicago, Illinois 60601



Alzina Building

100 North First Street

V-Tel Room, Third Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62777

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- I. Call to Order and Welcome
 - II. Roll Call of Task Force Members
 - III. Approval of Minutes from the June 19, 2014 Meeting
 - IV. Task Force Information/Data Review
 - V. Review State Policy on Absence
 - VI. ISBE Data Analysis End of Year Report
 - VII. Facilitated Discussion of Policy, Procedure, Practice, and Implications for Further Review Writing Summaries
 - VIII. Next Steps
 - IX. New Business/Open Discussion
 - X. Public Comment
 - XI. Adjournment

Task Force members seeking to participate by telephone may do so by dialing 1-888-494-4032 and entering the following access code: 3 6 3 3 7 5 2 7 0 9

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Truancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force



July 14, 2014

I. Call to Order and Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 a.m. due to technical difficulties with the video-teleconference hook-up and the telephone connection.

II. Roll Call of Task Force Members

Chicago

Jeff Aranowski
Andrew Broy (Eric Johnson)
Sarah Hains
Laurene Heybach
Leslie Juby
Melissa Mitchell
Michael Seelig
Maria Trejo
Dana Wright (Tangenes Porter)

Juliet Bromer
Aarti Dhupelia
Mary Howard
Madelyn James
Representative Linda Chapa LaVia
Jackie Price (Mary Riseling)
Antoinette Taylor
Kevin Walsh
Jack Wuest

Springfield

Arthur Sutton

Telephone

Fanny Diego Alvarez
Paul Sarvela (Brian Chapman)

Jennifer Berne

Not Present

Anna Alvarado
Senator Jacqueline Collins
Andrea Evans
Jim Kestner
Robert Lee
LaTanya McDade
Representative Sandi Pihos
Neli Vazquez Rowland
Elizabeth Swanson

Christine Boyd
Sen. Michael Connelly
Kevin Fahey
Crystal Laura
Shaalein Carroll Lopez
Kareem Pender
Theresa Plascencia
Barbara Sherry

III. Approval of Minutes from the June 19, 2014 Meeting

The minutes for the June 19, 2014 were approved.

[Type text]

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IV. Task Force Information/Data Review

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia thanked everyone for their commitment to the task force and said she would like to see a standing commission created to continue the work started by this group. She also said the problem with truancy is larger than what was thought and that the U. S. Department of Education has sent letters to Dr. Saddler from the Department of Human Services and Dr. Koch of the Illinois State Board of Education because there is a huge discrepancy involving the special needs community because they are not being calculated appropriately in truancy numbers. She said she has been consulting with representatives from the U. S. Department of Education and has learned that the undercount, which involves Black and Hispanic males, has resulted in reduced funding for special education initiatives as the government is only paying 17% out of the 40% share for that population. She said that the undercount is tantamount to child abuse. She wants to see a standing commission created in the state of Illinois through House Joint Resolution so that we deal with special education numbers and programming effectively.

Representative Chapa LaVia introduced Representative La Shawn Ford to the task force. He said he was present at the meeting to offer his support to the work of the task force to eradicate truancy as he represents the Austin Community on the west side of Chicago where truancy numbers are high. He is especially grateful to Representative Linda Chapa LaVia for doing something about the problem. Chairperson Taylor reminded the Task Force that Representative Ford, in collaboration with Representative Chapa LaVia, hosted a community forum on truancy in his district shortly after the Chicago Tribune series was published.

Chairperson Taylor thanked everyone for their passion and commitment as well as their observance of the protocols for such an advisory body. This ethical adherence to standards will ensure that the efforts or the results of the task force are not compromised or tainted by any improprieties. She was thankful to Dr. Koch for his assistance in signing off each month on the task force's progress and was gratified by Governor Quinn's ongoing interest in the work of the task force. The P-20 Council Chairman, Miguel del Valle, and his entire team have been in constant contact with her. She said there are very many people who have not been at the table but are very supportive of the work. She said she has every confidence that what we recommend is going to change the lives of children and families. She also thanked Dr. Barbara Byrd-Bennett of the Chicago Public Schools and her commitment to and assistance with the process. Many meetings have occurred between the two, and there has been movement forward although there is more that needs to be done.

She acknowledged the ongoing presence of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools at the table each month because that has facilitated joint conversations that are preventive in nature and leaves open the possibility that all children, including those with special needs, will have access to a quality education.

Representative Ford asked if there could be some consideration given to the victims of mental health whose conditions affect their school attendance.

Chairperson Taylor asked everyone to review the committee listings and the attendance rosters and to make sure everyone's participation and attendance records were correct.

V. Review State Policy on Absence

Jeff Aranowski provided a quick review of the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) policy on absence because the subject has been referenced in previous task force meetings. He said that ISBE does not have a policy, but there are a series of regulations. Article 26 of the School Code defines truancy, chronic truancy, habitual truancy, truant minors, and to some extent, valid excuses for missing school.

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Article 26 of the School Code requires us to develop rules by which districts will have to evaluate why a child is not attending school. In the context of the policies and the definitions of truancy is a requirement by ISBE regulation that each district provide their own definition of valid cause. The district is further responsible for diagnostic procedures to figure out why a child is not in school and supportive services the districts will be engaging in to get the child back in school. He explained that regulations are very basic in the sense that they require the district to have a policy on absenteeism and truancy, have a definition of what constitutes a valid cause for absence, have diagnostic services to figure out the reason for the absences, and finally supportive services when a child has been identified as truant to decrease the instances of absence altogether.

VI. ISBE Data Analysis End of Year Report

Chairperson Taylor reminded the task force of the data that was provided at a previous meeting that identified a high amount of trancies per child within the Chicago Public Schools and explained that she and Mr. Aranowski were still in the process of researching the data in order to confirm the formula used to identify data stated in the first column of the analysis which lists truant students.

Madelyn James asked a question relating to the capacity of districts to define certain terms related to attendance for determination of their own policies and wondered about the validity of district-to-district comparisons. Mr. Aranowski explained that there are common definitions for truancy which is a child's absence from school without an excuse for any portion of the school day.

Aarti Dhupelia asked if everyone has to report to ISBE on a common calculation, and Mr. Aranowski said everyone has to report on average daily attendance.

Melissa Mitchell asked if there was a lot of latitude around the definition of a valid cause for absence. Mr. Aranowski said that in Chicago it is the job of the principal to define what constitutes a valid cause for absence, and Ms. Dhupelia said there are guidelines but that principals do have some discretion. Mr. Aranowski said the difficulty is determining what constitutes a valid cause insofar as family vacations are concerned as some districts say no and others say yes to this excuse for missing school. He said ISBE would be open to creating a non-regulatory definition if it was thought that it would help.

Chairperson Taylor said that the state needs a common definition of what constitutes attendance, something she thinks should be in statute. She explained we really have to dig down and examine if it counts as attendance whenever a child is not in his or her seat at school such as when a student has an in-school suspension or has been sent to the dean's office. When they are not in their seats, they are missing instruction.

Representative Chapa LaVia said we reward districts by letting them report the average of the three best months and yet we give them funding for the entire year based on that calculation. She said what we need to do is create a new metric where we average the three best months and the three worst months and should also make it punitive because they otherwise would not care. She said the general public sees the average daily attendance and thinks it reflects the entire school year.

Representative Chapa LaVia also decried that fact that the mandatory age for school attendance is six years old starting with the 2014-2015 school year and there has been no public promotion of the change in school law.

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Mr. Aranowski said it will be interesting to see when Senate Bill 16 is revamped and if it will include a revamped funding formula for general state aid. He thinks it will be interesting to see if any version of Senate Bill 16 passes in veto for basic improvements on what basic school funding would be based on – poverty levels, student demographic characteristics, and/or a more weighted formula. It will be interesting to see if districts are less concerned about attendance for the funding side of things.

Ms. Dhupelia asked how the three-month view came to be standard for reporting average daily attendance.

Representative Chapa LaVia said she has no idea because those numbers are not realistic. She said when you really look inside the data, you see all the issues.

Representative Ford asked if there was an overriding policy as to what defines a truant student.

Mr. Aranowski said there is statutory definition of truancy. The variance is what districts consider individually as excused absences.

Chairperson Taylor said the task force, inclusive of all the member agencies and organizations, is our opportunity to present a cohesive point of view about what needs to be changed.

Representative Ford asked if the task force would have a problem setting forward a definition of what constitutes an excused absence and if it would preempt Home Rule.

Mr. Aranowski said if the task force was to recommend that the state should take a look at establishing common definitions, it could be approached in two different ways. He said we could provide non-regulatory guidance on the definition as best practice or we could look at the statute and see if we could amend the law to ensure uniformity. He said he has no idea about agency preference about how far we want to go, but that the state could provide technical assistance.

Ms. Dhupelia said she believes CPS has reasonable guidelines in place in terms of what defines ‘excused’ versus ‘unexcused’ absences and unanticipated nuances that happen in a child’s situation that cannot be categorized very easily. She thinks the value will be added through recommendations that will come around through strategies, procedures, and different things schools can do to intervene and prevent absenteeism and bring partners together to address absenteeism versus rule changes around definitions. She was not sure where we could get the most bang for our buck.

Representative Ford said he knows many CPS parents are remiss about not informing the school when their children are absent.

Ms. Dhupelia said she is additionally concerned about excused absences because the bigger work is around parent engagement and the importance of attendance, particularly for the younger students.

Representative Ford said he is very aware of the lack of parent engagement as he used to be a teacher and had to mark children truant when parents would not communicate their children’s absence to the school.

Rene Heybach said there are numerous barriers that the parents cannot overcome. She also said she has learned how crucial school attendance is after participating in the task force and favors a narrower definition. She explained further that the group as a whole does not think punishment is the appropriate response to the situation, however.

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Representative Ford said some parents lack the writing skills to compose a note for their child to bring to school. He said we have to figure out a way to help the parents. Ms. Dhupelia said the schools have call-in attendance lines, but Mr. Aranowski suggested that some absences may require some written documentation.

Chairperson Taylor explained that in the parent forum, it was apparent that there were misconceptions about the definitions of words like *attendance*, *absence*, *truancy*, etc. She said there is something wrong with the picture when average daily attendance goes up at the same time truancy figures climb. People cite the average daily attendance figures but do not dig deeply into the chronic truancy figures. There is nothing attached to these numbers; on their own, they mean nothing.

Juliet Bromer said it is necessary that school staff is aware about why their students are absent, so the definitions are so important in order to understand the numbers. She said there are so many low-income, working parents who have so many issues they are dealing with, and they really need emotional, psychological, and mental health supports and to get at the root of why they are choosing not to participate in school. It is more about the kind of relationships they have with school. She has been working in the North Lawndale community and has found that parents there do not perceive school as a good thing and that it is not a safe, comfortable place to be. As a result, they don't have a positive view of school because it is not supportive of them. The school building itself is not a friendly place. If the task force really wants to change things, the problem is deep.

Madelyn James said there are multiple generations of families living in the same community and attending the same school with negative feelings about the schools and the CPS system. These are the communities with the high levels of absenteeism and are the same communities with the food deserts, multiple generations of people in deep poverty, high incidents of trauma and violence, low infant birth weights, and infant mortality. They are communities that are under siege. Children from these communities are already behind before they even get to school, and when they are not in school, their absences are unexcused. When a child is not in school for any reason, they are losing valuable instruction time. She said we have to figure out how we can address those systemic problems. These children are not deliberately missing school; they are absent because of what is happening to families. She thinks the recommendations to be included in the report to the General Assembly should reflect a concern for families and their needs. We have to be aware of all the things that are happening to these children outside of school.

Chairperson Taylor brought up the subject of students with disabilities, some with unaddressed disabilities, and some who were homeless with breaks in school attendance who had missed services in school as a result. Some adults seek services they did not have while they were in school because of attendance issues. She explained the Department of Education's juvenile justice report just came out and the special needs population is sprinkled throughout the report. Ms. Taylor explained that there are so many facets to the problem of absenteeism and truancy, and it is very clear that the task force will not resolve all of this here today. The dialogue about truancy has to go on past July 31, perhaps through the creation of a commission.

Mr. Aranowski said truancy is symptomatic of other problems, and it is the result of other problems. He said there have been a lot of task forces and commissions created – on discipline, social/emotional learning, etc. – it might be beneficial to look at all these other task forces and commissions and look for the common threads and actually pull something together in a more comprehensive way. Some of our work here might inform another task force.

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Leslie Juby said there are many reports from previous task forces that are full of useful information that are just sitting there.

Melissa Mitchell said it is important to address the underlying causes of chronic truancy. In some communities, it is a matter of letting parents know that every day of school counts even though a trip to Disney World is really fun, it is not the best use of school time. In other communities, you need deep and sustained approaches to address the underlying causes and building those relationships. Schools have to be accountable and plan for ways addressing those underlying causes, forming community partnerships to connect with family engagement. Ms. Mitchell said she understands that districts may have policies and procedures in place, but what accountability is there if year after year, there are no changes?

Mr. Aranowski suggested that districts be required to re-evaluate their policies if there are no changes in attendance patterns.

Chairperson Taylor said that is why there should be emphasis on the three worst months of attendance in addition to the three best months so you can analyze the gap. If you look at the data, you can determine what you were doing during each of those three month segments to determine what was going well and what was not.

Sarah Hains expressed her concern that the recommendations of the task force will not be followed. She explained that schools have a lot of autonomy and that truancy reduction plans are not being monitored to see how they are administered and if they are being implemented. She wondered also how the schools that need an intervention are going to be identified without being turned over to the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL). If you are constantly on probation, she explained, every bit of power is stripped from you, all your teachers are fired and your school is turned over. Schools need help and support. She wants recommendations to include ways for districts to help schools.

Ms. Dhupelia explained that this year they have identified, based on attendance performance, the bottom quartile of schools struggling the most with chronic absence and chronic truancy and have targeted resources toward those schools. Each school worked with the network to tailor plans to meet the unique needs of their students, solutions that included mentors and social workers, and they have seen improvements in attendance. It is not a matter of closing down schools or turning them over to someone else. CPS is working with them, studying the data, identifying the needs, targeting the data, meeting these challenges, and working with them.

Melissa Mitchell asked if there is some kind of effort to inform schools of the efficacy of some improvement plans.

Ms. Taylor asked how schools were selected to take part in the Cook County Sheriff's pilot program using a truancy coordinator. Tangenise Porter (proxy for Dana Wright) explained that the sheriff himself was in Robbins once during school time and noticed a lot of school-age children hanging around. The school district serving the town of Robbins was selected for the pilot program.

Ms. James commented that it is as important to focus on the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten absence numbers as it is for older students transitioning to high schools.

Ms. Dhupelia said that they see certain pockets where the absenteeism rates are higher. We look at neighborhoods where the attendance challenges are the greatest, and they target where those challenges are.

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Representative Ford said it is important to focus on absence in early childhood programs as that educational experience provides the foundation for future school experiences. If students lack this foundation, the likelihood is that they will be truant later on.

Representative Chapa LaVia asked Sarah Hains what she meant by the lack of follow-through with CPS. Ms. Hains said she does not see many mandates for CPS in the recommendations as the language seems tentative with words like 'should' rather than 'must have.' She said there are already plans to correct absenteeism written into School Improvement Plan and her thought was, "Who is looking at this? Who is making sure that a high school is actually implementing the plan?" Then the school continues to falter.

Representative Chapa LaVia said we may need to put it in statute for CPS to do what it needs to do. I know there will be push-back from administration.

VII. Facilitated Discussion of Policy, Procedure, Practice, and Implications for Further Review Writing Summaries

Sue Horan addressed the group about the fact that the Writing Committee members had prepared some narratives incorporating the recommendations. She asked that the group break up into four groups and discuss what the most important components of the report should be. How can the report be made tighter? What should be included? What should be deleted?

After group discussions, the group reassembled and discussion leaders offered summaries.

Policy: This group reported that they thought the report would be more concise and more likely to be read if it was centered around the issues, rather than what the Chicago Public Schools, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the General Assembly needs to do. Some of the most important issues identified by the groups were data, definition of terms, creating attendance teams in schools, having an attendance coordinator, adequate revenue sources, and staff training. There is a need to eliminate duplicates and sharpen the focus on the most specific recommendations. Four priorities: data, revenue, staff training, and attendance teams.

Practice/Procedure: This team came up with 'buckets' as a means of categorization of their ideas to format the report:

- front-end data to empower decision-making,
- solutions – programs and partnerships,
- support for the implementation of the previous two items, and
- data on the back end to evaluate success/progress.

They decided there were a couple of general things that they needed to see in the document. It would be easy to unpack all the bulleted recommendations if they were dropped into the buckets.

Implications for Further Review: This group decided there should be an emphasis on linking data systems and on tracking students. They explained that there should be an examination of the Student Information System and the Longitudinal Data System to see what the capabilities already exist and to see if the data solutions are right there. Another major implication for further review is to formalize the task force into an ongoing commission that would provide continuity to the effort statewide and provide a clearinghouse for best practices in related areas. It should be made into an interdisciplinary group and prioritize the truancy recommendations.

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Ms. James gave voice to the concept of addressing the truancy issue as an attendance issue since the goal is to have children seated at desks in classrooms and not missing any school. A focus on truancy misses a lot of children who are not in school, but not necessarily truant.

Ms. Bromer said we have to engage children and make schools interesting places to be.

Mr. Aranowski said that could also be the work of a permanent commission, to advise schools on ways to engage students.

VIII. Next Steps

Chairperson Taylor reminded the group that this was the final meeting of the task force. Insofar as the writing of the report is concerned, she reminded the group further that the Writing Committee had a meeting on June 27, 2014, to which everyone was invited to attend.

Ms. Taylor explained further that the task force would receive a draft copy of the report by July 25, 2014 and the members would have until close of business on Monday, July 28, 2014 to submit their suggestions for revision.

There was some discussion regarding additional input from the task force into the final report and it was reiterated that all task force members would receive a draft copy of the final report on July 25, 2014 and would have until close of business on July 28, 2014 to submit suggestions for revision.

Ms. Taylor put the issue of the final report timeline to vote, and nobody opposed.

IX. New Business/Open Discussion

Ms. Taylor informed the task force that some people had brought information from their respective agencies and organizations to share with other task force members, and these items were available to be picked up at the end of the meeting.

Ms. Taylor also took the opportunity to explain she is not an employee of anyone in General Assembly, the Illinois State Board of Education, or the Chicago Public Schools. She is an independent exceptional needs consultant and is self-employed. Her participation on the task force was strictly voluntary, and she received no compensation for her effort. She addressed the task force in this regard because somebody had alleged she had a contractual relationship which was not the case.

X. Public Comment

There were several members of the public present, but no one wished to comment.

Ms. Taylor acknowledged a member of the media was present and indicated her gratitude for the media's involvement in the issue of absenteeism and truancy. She was also happy to report that everyone stayed within the protocol established for media relations.

Representative Chapa LaVia thanked everyone for their involvement in and support for the work of the task force.

Ms. Taylor expressed her gratitude to Senator Jacqueline Collins for her ongoing support for the work of the task force especially her participation in arranging one of the public hearings. She asked the Task Force members to keep Senator Collins in their prayers as she had been informed that the senator had a

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family emergency that kept her from attending the final task force meeting. She also added that although she is not a spokesperson for Senator Collins, she was sure that she would wish to thank everyone for their participation on the task force. She additionally expressed her thanks to the members of the task force for their commitment and time.

XI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:57 p.m.

Appendix F

Public Hearings Notice



Tuancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force
Notice of Public Hearings
Dates, Times, Venues, and Hosts

Effective May 28, 2013, House Joint Resolution 0001 (HJR 0001) created the Tuancy in Chicago Public Schools Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force is to examine issues and make recommendations related to current State Board of Education and City of Chicago School District 299 policies regarding truancy and excessive absences. As part of its examination and in the course of its duties, the Task Force shall:

1. Identify different strategies and approaches to help educators and the City of Chicago School District 299 administration address the truancy and excessive absences epidemic in the City of Chicago,
2. Promote ongoing professional development to equip school personnel with the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce contributing factors to truancy and excessive absences,
3. Support community-based organizations and parents in their ongoing efforts to encourage youths to adopt and practice positive social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in school and in their communities,
4. Hold public hearings in the City of Chicago, and
5. Report its findings to the General Assembly.

Public hearings will be held as follows. We encourage all parents, students, educators and community members to attend one of the public hearings to provide insight, recommendations, and experiences in addressing truancy in Chicago Public Schools. Information regarding truancy, attendance, and special topics will also be distributed to those in attendance.

March 10, 2014

Time: 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Doors open at 5:00 p.m.. Public Hearing begins at 5:30 p.m.

Host: L.E.A.D.E.R.S Network

Venue: New Mt. Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church (Lower Level Auditorium)
4301 West Washington Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60624

April 28, 2014

Time: 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Doors open at 5:00 p.m. Public Hearing begins at 5:30 p.m.

Host: Senator Jacqueline Collins

Venue: Urban Partnership Bank (Community Room)
7801 South State Street
Chicago, Illinois 60619

May 3, 2014

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Doors open at 2:00. Public Hearing begins at 2:30 p.m.

Host: Pilgrim Baptist Church of South Chicago

Venue: Pilgrim Baptist Church of South Chicago (Lower Level Hall)
3235 East 91st Street
Chicago, Illinois 60617

Appendix G

Statutory and Regulatory References

(105 ILCS 5/Art. 26 heading)

ARTICLE 26. PUPILS--COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

(105 ILCS 5/26-1) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-1)

(Text of Section before amendment by P.A. 98-544)

Sec. 26-1. Compulsory school age-Exemptions. Whoever has custody or control of any child between the ages of 7 and 17 years (unless the child has already graduated from high school) shall cause such child to attend some public school in the district wherein the child resides the entire time it is in session during the regular school term, except as provided in Section 10-19.1, and during a required summer school program established under Section 10-22.33B; provided, that the following children shall not be required to attend the public schools:

1. Any child attending a private or a parochial school where children are taught the branches of education taught to children of corresponding age and grade in the public schools, and where the instruction of the child in the branches of education is in the English language;
2. Any child who is physically or mentally unable to attend school, such disability being certified to the county or district truant officer by a competent physician licensed in Illinois to practice medicine and surgery in all its branches, a chiropractic physician licensed under the Medical Practice Act of 1987, an advanced practice nurse who has a written collaborative agreement with a collaborating physician that authorizes the advanced practice nurse to perform health examinations, a physician assistant who has been delegated the authority to perform health examinations by his or her supervising physician, or a Christian Science practitioner residing in this State and listed in the Christian Science Journal; or who is excused for temporary absence for cause by the principal or teacher of the school which the child attends; the exemptions in this paragraph (2) do not apply to any female who is pregnant or the mother of one or more children, except where a female is unable to attend school due to a complication arising from her pregnancy and the existence of such complication is certified to the county or district truant officer by a competent physician;
3. Any child necessarily and lawfully employed according to the provisions of the law regulating child labor may be excused from attendance at school by the county superintendent of schools or the superintendent of the public school which the child should be attending, on certification of the facts by and the recommendation of the school board of the public school district in which the child resides. In districts having part time continuation schools, children so excused shall attend such schools at least 8 hours each week;
4. Any child over 12 and under 14 years of age while in attendance at confirmation classes;
5. Any child absent from a public school on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day for the

reason that he is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study or work requirements on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day, because the tenets of his religion forbid secular activity on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day. Each school board shall prescribe rules and regulations relative to absences for religious holidays including, but not limited to, a list of religious holidays on which it shall be mandatory to excuse a child; but nothing in this paragraph 5 shall be construed to limit the right of any school board, at its discretion, to excuse an absence on any other day by reason of the observance of a religious holiday. A school board may require the parent or guardian of a child who is to be excused from attending school due to the observance of a religious holiday to give notice, not exceeding 5 days, of the child's absence to the school principal or other school personnel. Any child excused from attending school under this paragraph 5 shall not be required to submit a written excuse for such absence after returning to school; and

6. Any child 16 years of age or older who (i) submits to a school district evidence of necessary and lawful employment pursuant to paragraph 3 of this Section and (ii) is enrolled in a graduation incentives program pursuant to Section 26-16 of this Code or an alternative learning opportunities program established pursuant to Article 13B of this Code.

(Source: P.A. 96-367, eff. 8-13-09.)

(Text of Section after amendment by P.A. 98-544)

Sec. 26-1. Compulsory school age-Exemptions. Whoever has custody or control of any child (i) between the ages of 7 and 17 years (unless the child has already graduated from high school) for school years before the 2014-2015 school year or (ii) between the ages of 6 (on or before September 1) and 17 years (unless the child has already graduated from high school) beginning with the 2014-2015 school year shall cause such child to attend some public school in the district wherein the child resides the entire time it is in session during the regular school term, except as provided in Section 10-19.1, and during a required summer school program established under Section 10-22.33B; provided, that the following children shall not be required to attend the public schools:

1. Any child attending a private or a parochial school where children are taught the branches of education taught to children of corresponding age and grade in the public schools, and where the instruction of the child in the branches of education is in the English language;
2. Any child who is physically or mentally unable to attend school, such disability being certified to the county or district truant officer by a competent physician licensed in Illinois to practice medicine and surgery in all its branches, a chiropractic physician licensed under the Medical Practice Act of 1987, an advanced practice nurse who has a written collaborative agreement with a collaborating physician that authorizes the advanced practice nurse to perform health examinations, a physician assistant who has been delegated the

authority to perform health examinations by his or her supervising physician, or a Christian Science practitioner residing in this State and listed in the Christian Science Journal; or who is excused for temporary absence for cause by the principal or teacher of the school which the child attends; the exemptions in this paragraph (2) do not apply to any female who is pregnant or the mother of one or more children, except where a female is unable to attend school due to a complication arising from her pregnancy and the existence of such complication is certified to the county or district truant officer by a competent physician;

3. Any child necessarily and lawfully employed according to the provisions of the law regulating child labor may be excused from attendance at school by the county superintendent of schools or the superintendent of the public school which the child should be attending, on certification of the facts by and the recommendation of the school board of the public school district in which the child resides. In districts having part time continuation schools, children so excused shall attend such schools at least 8 hours each week;

4. Any child over 12 and under 14 years of age while in attendance at confirmation classes;

5. Any child absent from a public school on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day for the reason that he is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study or work requirements on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day, because the tenets of his religion forbid secular activity on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day. Each school board shall prescribe rules and regulations relative to absences for religious holidays including, but not limited to, a list of religious holidays on which it shall be mandatory to excuse a child; but nothing in this paragraph 5 shall be construed to limit the right of any school board, at its discretion, to excuse an absence on any other day by reason of the observance of a religious holiday. A school board may require the parent or guardian of a child who is to be excused from attending school due to the observance of a religious holiday to give notice, not exceeding 5 days, of the child's absence to the school principal or other school personnel. Any child excused from attending school under this paragraph 5 shall not be required to submit a written excuse for such absence after returning to school; and

6. Any child 16 years of age or older who (i) submits to a school district evidence of necessary and lawful employment pursuant to paragraph 3 of this Section and (ii) is enrolled in a graduation incentives program pursuant to Section 26-16 of this Code or an alternative learning opportunities program established pursuant to Article 13B of this Code.

(Source: P.A. 98-544, eff. 7-1-14.)

(Text of Section before amendment by P.A. 98-544)

Sec. 26-2. Enrolled pupils below 7 or over 17.

(a) Any person having custody or control of a child who is below the age of 7 years or is 17 years of age or above and who is enrolled in any of grades kindergarten through 12 in the public school shall cause him to attend the public school in the district wherein he resides when it is in session during the regular school term, unless he is excused under paragraph 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 of Section 26-1.

(b) A school district shall deny reenrollment in its secondary schools to any child 19 years of age or above who has dropped out of school and who could not, because of age and lack of credits, attend classes during the normal school year and graduate before his or her twenty-first birthday. A district may, however, enroll the child in a graduation incentives program under Section 26-16 of this Code or an alternative learning opportunities program established under Article 13B. No child shall be denied reenrollment for the above reasons unless the school district first offers the child due process as required in cases of expulsion under Section 10-22.6. If a child is denied reenrollment after being provided with due process, the school district must provide counseling to that child and must direct that child to alternative educational programs, including adult education programs, that lead to graduation or receipt of a GED diploma.

(c) A school or school district may deny enrollment to a student 17 years of age or older for one semester for failure to meet minimum academic standards if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The student achieved a grade point average of less than "D" (or its equivalent) in the semester immediately prior to the current semester.

(2) The student and the student's parent or guardian are given written notice warning that the student is failing academically and is subject to denial from enrollment for one semester unless a "D" average (or its equivalent) or better is attained in the current semester.

(3) The parent or guardian is provided with the right to appeal the notice, as determined by the State Board of Education in accordance with due process.

(4) The student is provided with an academic improvement plan and academic remediation services.

(5) The student fails to achieve a "D" average (or its equivalent) or better in the current semester.

A school or school district may deny enrollment to a student 17 years of age or older for one semester for failure to meet minimum attendance standards if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The student was absent without valid cause for 20% or more of the attendance days in the semester immediately prior to the current semester.

(2) The student and the student's parent or guardian are given written notice warning that the student is subject to denial from enrollment for one semester unless the student is absent without valid cause less than 20% of the attendance days in the current semester.

(3) The student's parent or guardian is provided with

the right to appeal the notice, as determined by the State Board of Education in accordance with due process.

(4) The student is provided with attendance remediation services, including without limitation assessment, counseling, and support services.

(5) The student is absent without valid cause for 20% or more of the attendance days in the current semester.

A school or school district may not deny enrollment to a student (or reenrollment to a dropout) who is at least 17 years of age or older but below 19 years for more than one consecutive semester for failure to meet academic or attendance standards.

(d) No child may be denied enrollment or reenrollment under this Section in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

(e) In this subsection (e), "reenrolled student" means a dropout who has reenrolled full-time in a public school. Each school district shall identify, track, and report on the educational progress and outcomes of reenrolled students as a subset of the district's required reporting on all enrollments. A reenrolled student who again drops out must not be counted again against a district's dropout rate performance measure. The State Board of Education shall set performance standards for programs serving reenrolled students.

(f) The State Board of Education shall adopt any rules necessary to implement the changes to this Section made by Public Act 93-803.

(Source: P.A. 95-417, eff. 8-24-07.)

(Text of Section after amendment by P.A. 98-544)

Sec. 26-2. Enrolled pupils not of compulsory school age.

(a) For school years before the 2014-2015 school year, any person having custody or control of a child who is below the age of 7 years or is 17 years of age or above and who is enrolled in any of grades kindergarten through 12 in the public school shall cause him to attend the public school in the district wherein he resides when it is in session during the regular school term, unless he is excused under paragraph 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 of Section 26-1. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, any person having custody or control of a child who is below the age of 6 years or is 17 years of age or above and who is enrolled in any of grades kindergarten through 12 in the public school shall cause the child to attend the public school in the district wherein he or she resides when it is in session during the regular school term, unless the child is excused under paragraph 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 of Section 26-1 of this Code.

(b) A school district shall deny reenrollment in its secondary schools to any child 19 years of age or above who has dropped out of school and who could not, because of age and lack of credits, attend classes during the normal school year and graduate before his or her twenty-first birthday. A district may, however, enroll the child in a graduation incentives program under Section 26-16 of this Code or an alternative learning opportunities program established under Article 13B. No child shall be denied reenrollment for the above reasons unless the school district first offers the child due process

as required in cases of expulsion under Section 10-22.6. If a child is denied reenrollment after being provided with due process, the school district must provide counseling to that child and must direct that child to alternative educational programs, including adult education programs, that lead to graduation or receipt of a GED diploma.

(c) A school or school district may deny enrollment to a student 17 years of age or older for one semester for failure to meet minimum academic standards if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The student achieved a grade point average of less than "D" (or its equivalent) in the semester immediately prior to the current semester.

(2) The student and the student's parent or guardian are given written notice warning that the student is failing academically and is subject to denial from enrollment for one semester unless a "D" average (or its equivalent) or better is attained in the current semester.

(3) The parent or guardian is provided with the right to appeal the notice, as determined by the State Board of Education in accordance with due process.

(4) The student is provided with an academic improvement plan and academic remediation services.

(5) The student fails to achieve a "D" average (or its equivalent) or better in the current semester.

A school or school district may deny enrollment to a student 17 years of age or older for one semester for failure to meet minimum attendance standards if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The student was absent without valid cause for 20% or more of the attendance days in the semester immediately prior to the current semester.

(2) The student and the student's parent or guardian are given written notice warning that the student is subject to denial from enrollment for one semester unless the student is absent without valid cause less than 20% of the attendance days in the current semester.

(3) The student's parent or guardian is provided with the right to appeal the notice, as determined by the State Board of Education in accordance with due process.

(4) The student is provided with attendance remediation services, including without limitation assessment, counseling, and support services.

(5) The student is absent without valid cause for 20% or more of the attendance days in the current semester.

A school or school district may not deny enrollment to a student (or reenrollment to a dropout) who is at least 17 years of age or older but below 19 years for more than one consecutive semester for failure to meet academic or attendance standards.

(d) No child may be denied enrollment or reenrollment under this Section in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

(e) In this subsection (e), "reenrolled student" means a dropout who has reenrolled full-time in a public school. Each school district shall identify, track, and report on the educational progress and outcomes of reenrolled students as a

subset of the district's required reporting on all enrollments. A reenrolled student who again drops out must not be counted again against a district's dropout rate performance measure. The State Board of Education shall set performance standards for programs serving reenrolled students.

(f) The State Board of Education shall adopt any rules necessary to implement the changes to this Section made by Public Act 93-803.

(Source: P.A. 98-544, eff. 7-1-14.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-2a) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-2a)

Sec. 26-2a. A "truant" is defined as a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for a school day or portion thereof.

"Valid cause" for absence shall be illness, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, family emergency, and shall include such other situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the board of education in each district, or such other circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for the safety or health of the student.

"Chronic or habitual truant" shall be defined as a child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days.

"Truant minor" is defined as a chronic truant to whom supportive services, including prevention, diagnostic, intervention and remedial services, alternative programs and other school and community resources have been provided and have failed to result in the cessation of chronic truancy, or have been offered and refused.

A "dropout" is defined as any child enrolled in grades 9 through 12 whose name has been removed from the district enrollment roster for any reason other than the student's death, extended illness, removal for medical non-compliance, expulsion, aging out, graduation, or completion of a program of studies and who has not transferred to another public or private school and is not known to be home-schooled by his or her parents or guardians or continuing school in another country.

"Religion" for the purposes of this Article, includes all aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as belief.

(Source: P.A. 96-1423, eff. 8-3-10; 97-218, eff. 7-28-11.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-2b) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-2b)

Sec. 26-2b. Any child enrolled in a public school who is unable, because of the observance of a religious holiday, to attend classes on a particular day or days or at a particular

time of day shall be excused from any examination or any study or work assignments on such particular day or days or at such particular time of day. It shall be the responsibility of the teachers and of the administrative officials of each public school to make available to each child who is absent from school because of the observance of a religious holiday an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which he has missed because of such absence on any particular day or days or at any particular time of day. No special fees of any kind shall be charged to the child for making available to such child such equivalent opportunity. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any child because of his availing himself of the provisions of this Section.

The provisions of this Section shall apply only if the rules and regulations of the school board promulgated pursuant to paragraph 5 of Section 26-1 have been complied with.

(Source: P.A. 84-212.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-3) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-3)

Sec. 26-3. Teachers furnished list-Report of non-attendance-Report of persons not on list.

The clerk or secretary of the school board of all school districts except those employing district truant officers shall furnish the superintendent of schools at the beginning of the school year a list of the names and addresses of the children living in the district who come under the provisions of this Article and of persons having custody or control of such children. The superintendent shall at the opening of school and at other times when required by the regional superintendent of schools compare the list with the enrollment of the school or schools and report to the regional superintendent of schools the names of persons having custody or control of children included under the provisions of this Article who are truant or who are chronic or habitual truants for whom supportive services and other school resources have failed to correct the truant behavior and who are not in regular attendance at the public school, and the names of such children and their ages, stating in each case, if known, the cause of such absence. The report shall also contain the names of any other persons who were not enumerated in the list at the beginning of school and who have the custody or control of children not attending school. The regional superintendent shall, without delay, place such information at the disposal of the regional truant officer.

(Source: P.A. 80-908.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-3a) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-3a)

Sec. 26-3a. Report of pupils no longer enrolled in school.

The clerk or secretary of the school board of all school

districts shall furnish quarterly on the first school day of October, January, April and July to the regional superintendent and to the Secretary of State a list of pupils, excluding transferees, who have been expelled or have withdrawn or who have left school and have been removed from the regular attendance rolls during the period of time school was in regular session from the time of the previous quarterly report. Such list shall include the names and addresses of pupils formerly in attendance, the names and addresses of persons having custody or control of such pupils, the reason, if known, such pupils are no longer in attendance and the date of removal from the attendance rolls. The list shall also include the names of: pupils whose withdrawal is due to extraordinary circumstances, including but not limited to economic or medical necessity or family hardship, as determined by the criteria established by the school district; pupils who have re-enrolled in school since their names were removed from the attendance rolls; any pupil certified to be a chronic or habitual truant, as defined in Section 26-2a; and pupils previously certified as chronic or habitual truants who have resumed regular school attendance. The regional superintendent shall inform the county or district truant officer who shall investigate to see that such pupils are in compliance with the requirements of this Article. Each local school district shall establish, in writing, a set of criteria for use by the local superintendent of schools in determining whether a pupil's failure to attend school is the result of extraordinary circumstances, including but not limited to economic or medical necessity or family hardship. If a pupil re-enrolls in school after his or her name was removed from the attendance rolls or resumes regular attendance after being certified a chronic or habitual truant, the pupil must obtain and forward to the Secretary of State, on a form designated by the Secretary of State, verification of his or her re-enrollment. The verification may be in the form of a signature or seal or in any other form determined by the school board. The State Board of Education shall, if possible, make available to any person, upon request, a comparison of drop out rates before and after the effective date of this amendatory Act of the 94th General Assembly.

(Source: P.A. 94-916, eff. 7-1-07; 95-496, eff. 8-28-07.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-3b) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-3b)

Sec. 26-3b. Beginning July 1, 1986, if any child enrolled in a public school in grades Kindergarten through 8 is absent from school, and there is no record that such absence is for a valid cause, as defined under Article 26 of this Code, nor notification that the absence has been authorized by the parent, legal guardian or other person having legal custody of such child, an employee or other agent, whether a volunteer or otherwise, designated by the public school in which the child is enrolled shall, within 2 hours after the first class in

which the child is enrolled, make a reasonable effort to promptly telephone and notify the parent, legal guardian, or other person having legal custody of the child, of the child's absence from school. Such notification shall not be given for an absence authorized by the parent, legal guardian or other person having legal custody of such child. Prior to any enrollment of a child in a public school, the school district shall notify parents, legal guardians, or other persons having legal custody of a child, of their responsibility to authorize any absence and to notify the school in advance or at the time of any such absence, and that the school requires at least one and not more than 2 telephone numbers be given for purposes of this Section. The school district shall require that such telephone numbers be given at the time of enrollment of the child in school, which said numbers may be changed from time to time upon notification to the school.

The requirements of this Section shall have been met by the school if notification of an absence has been attempted by telephoning the 1 or 2 numbers given the school by the parent, legal guardian or other person having legal custody of a child, whether or not there is any answer at such telephone number or numbers. Further, the requirements of this Section shall have been met if the said notification is given to a member of the household of the child's parent, legal guardian or other person having legal custody of the child, which said member of the household must be 10 years of age or older. An employee or other agent designated by the public school who in good faith makes a reasonable effort to notify the parent, legal guardian or other person having legal custody of a child of the child's absence from school, when required by this Section, shall not, as a result of his acts or omissions, except wilful or wanton misconduct on the part of such employee or agent in attempting to comply with the notification requirements of this Section, be liable for civil damages.

(Source: P.A. 84-178; 84-682.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-3d) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-3d)

Sec. 26-3d. All regional superintendents, district superintendents, and special education joint agreement directors shall collect data concerning truants, chronic truants, and truant minor pupils as designated by the State Board of Education. On or before August 15 of each year, this data must be submitted to the State Board of Education.

(Source: P.A. 96-734, eff. 8-25-09.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-4)

Sec. 26-4. (Repealed).

(Source: Repealed by P.A. 88-50.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-5) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-5)

Sec. 26-5. Duties of truant officers.

The truant officer of the school district, whenever notified by the Superintendent, teacher, or other person of violations of this Article, or the county truant officer, when notified by the County Superintendent, shall investigate all cases of truancy or non-attendance at school in their respective jurisdictions, and if the children complained of are not exempt under the provisions of this Article, the truant officer shall proceed as is provided in this Article. The county truant officer, within the county and the district truant officers, within their respective districts, shall in the exercise of their duties be conservators of the peace and shall keep the same, suppress riots, routs, affray, fighting, breaches of the peace, and prevent crime; and may arrest offenders on view and cause them to be brought before proper officials for trial or examination.

(Source: Laws 1961, p. 31.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-6) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-6)

Sec. 26-6. List and reports in districts employing truant officers.

In school districts which employ truant officers the clerk or secretary of the school board shall at the beginning of each school year furnish a copy of the last school census to the superintendent of schools (or principal teacher) in the district, together with the names and addresses of the truant officers in the district, and the superintendent, (or principal teacher) shall compare the census list with the enrollment of the school or schools and, from time to time, report to the proper truant officers the names and addresses of persons having custody or control of children included under the provisions of this Article who are truant or who are chronic or habitual truants for whom supportive services and other school resources have failed to correct the truant behavior and who are not in regular attendance at public schools and also the names of persons having custody or control of children who are not in regular attendance at school and whose names are not included in the census list.

(Source: P.A. 80-908.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-7) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-7)

Sec. 26-7. Notice to custodian-Notice of non-compliance. If any person fails to send any child under his custody or control to some lawful school, the truant officer or, in a school district that does not have a truant officer, the

regional superintendent of schools or his or her designee shall, as soon as practicable after he is notified thereof, give notice in person or by mail to such person that such child shall be present at the proper public school on the day following the receipt of such notice. The notice shall state the date that attendance at school must begin and that such attendance must be continuous and consecutive in the district during the remainder of the school year. The truant officer or, in a school district that does not have a truant officer, the regional superintendent of schools or his or her designee shall at the same time that such notice is given notify the teacher or superintendent of the proper public school thereof and the teacher or superintendent shall notify the truant officer or regional superintendent of schools of any non-compliance therewith.

(Source: P.A. 93-858, eff. 1-1-05.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-8) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-8)
Sec. 26-8. Determination as to compliance - Complaint in circuit court. A truant officer or, in a school district that does not have a truant officer, the regional superintendent of schools or his or her designee, after giving the notice provided in Section 26-7, shall determine whether the notice has been complied with. If 3 notices have been given and the notices have not been complied with, and if the persons having custody or control have knowingly and wilfully permitted the truant behavior to continue, the regional superintendent of schools, or his or her designee, of the school district where the child resides shall conduct a truancy hearing. If the regional superintendent determines as a result of the hearing that the child is truant, the regional superintendent shall, if age appropriate at the discretion of the regional superintendent, require the student to complete 20 to 40 hours of community service over a period of 90 days. If the truancy persists, the regional superintendent shall (i) make complaint against the persons having custody or control to the state's attorney or in the circuit court in the county where such person resides for failure to comply with the provisions of this Article or (ii) conduct truancy mediation and encourage the student to enroll in a graduation incentives program under Section 26-16 of this Code. If, however, after giving the notice provided in Section 26-7 the truant behavior has continued, and the child is beyond the control of the parents, guardians or custodians, a truancy petition shall be filed under the provisions of Article III of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.

(Source: P.A. 93-858, eff. 1-1-05; 93-1079, eff. 1-21-05.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-8a) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-8a)
Sec. 26-8a. The petition for court action shall include the

name of the truant minor, the names and addresses of persons having custody or control of the student, the dates of the truant behavior, the dates and nature of contacts or conferences with the student and the persons having custody or control of the student, and the nature of the supportive services, alternative programs and other school resources the school district provided to that child in an effort to correct that child's truant behavior.

(Source: P.A. 80-908.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-8b) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-8b)

Sec. 26-8b. When a petition is filed, it shall be set for an adjudicatory hearing within 10 days and acted upon within 30 days, subject to the provisions of the Juvenile Court Act or the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 if filed thereunder.

(Source: P.A. 85-1209.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-9) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-9)

Sec. 26-9. School officers and teachers to assist truant officers.

School officers, superintendents, teachers or other persons shall render such assistance and furnish such information as they have to aid truant officers in the performance of their duties.

(Source: Laws 1961, p. 31.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-10) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-10)

Sec. 26-10. Fine for noncompliance.) Any person having custody or control of a child subject to the provisions of this Article to whom notice has been given of the child's truancy and who knowingly and wilfully permits such a child to persist in his truancy within that school year, upon conviction thereof shall be guilty of a Class C misdemeanor and shall be subject to not more than 30 days imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$500.

(Source: P.A. 80-908.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-11) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-11)

Sec. 26-11. Punishment for certain offenses.

Any person who induces or attempts to induce any child to be absent from school unlawfully, or who knowingly employs or harbors, while school is in session, any child absent unlawfully from school for 3 consecutive school days, is

guilty of a Class C misdemeanor.
(Source: P.A. 77-2267.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-12) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-12)
Sec. 26-12. Punitive action. No punitive action including out of school suspensions, expulsions or court action, shall be taken against chronic truants for such truancy unless available supportive services and other school resources have been provided to the student.
(Source: P.A. 85-234.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-13) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-13)
Sec. 26-13. Absenteeism and truancy policies. School districts shall adopt policies, consistent with rules adopted by the State Board of Education, which identify the appropriate supportive services and available resources which are provided for truants and chronic truants.
(Source: P.A. 84-1420.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-14) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-14)
Sec. 26-14. Truancy programs for dropouts. Any dropout, as defined in Section 26-2a, who is 17 years of age may apply to a school district for status as a truant, and the school district shall permit such person to participate in the district's various programs and resources for truants. At the time of the person's application, the district may request documentation of his dropout status for the previous 6 months.
(Source: P.A. 93-858, eff. 1-1-05.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-15) (from Ch. 122, par. 26-15)
Sec. 26-15. Truant minors. When a regional superintendent has reason to believe that a pupil is a truant minor as defined in Section 26-2a, the regional superintendent may report such pupil under the provisions of the Juvenile Court Act.
(Source: P.A. 85-1209.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-16)
Sec. 26-16. Graduation incentives program.
(a) The General Assembly finds that it is critical to provide

options for children to succeed in school. The purpose of this Section is to provide incentives for and encourage all Illinois students who have experienced or are experiencing difficulty in the traditional education system to enroll in alternative programs.

(b) Any student who is below the age of 20 years is eligible to enroll in a graduation incentives program if he or she:

- (1) is considered a dropout pursuant to Section 26-2a of this Code;
- (2) has been suspended or expelled pursuant to Section 10-22.6 or 34-19 of this Code;
- (3) is pregnant or is a parent;
- (4) has been assessed as chemically dependent; or
- (5) is enrolled in a bilingual education or LEP program.

(c) The following programs qualify as graduation incentives programs for students meeting the criteria established in this Section:

- (1) Any public elementary or secondary education graduation incentives program established by a school district or by a regional office of education.
- (2) Any alternative learning opportunities program established pursuant to Article 13B of this Code.
- (3) Vocational or job training courses approved by the State Superintendent of Education that are available through the Illinois public community college system. Students may apply for reimbursement of 50% of tuition costs for one course per semester or a maximum of 3 courses per school year. Subject to available funds, students may apply for reimbursement of up to 100% of tuition costs upon a showing of employment within 6 months after completion of a vocational or job training program. The qualifications for reimbursement shall be established by the State Superintendent of Education by rule.
- (4) Job and career programs approved by the State Superintendent of Education that are available through Illinois-accredited private business and vocational schools. Subject to available funds, pupils may apply for reimbursement of up to 100% of tuition costs upon a showing of employment within 6 months after completion of a job or career program. The State Superintendent of Education shall establish, by rule, the qualifications for reimbursement, criteria for determining reimbursement amounts, and limits on reimbursement.

(5) Adult education courses that offer preparation for the General Educational Development Test.

(d) Graduation incentives programs established by school districts are entitled to claim general State aid, subject to Sections 13B-50, 13B-50.5, and 13B-50.10 of this Code. Graduation incentives programs operated by regional offices of education are entitled to receive general State aid at the foundation level of support per pupil enrolled. A school district must ensure that its graduation incentives program receives supplemental general State aid, transportation reimbursements, and special education resources, if appropriate, for students enrolled in the program.

(Source: P.A. 93-858, eff. 1-1-05; 93-1079, eff. 1-21-05.)

(105 ILCS 5/26-17)

Sec. 26-17. (Repealed).

(Source: P.A. 97-911, eff. 8-8-12. Repealed internally, eff. 11-2-12.)

105 ILCS 5/34-4.5

Sec. 34-4.5. Chronic truants.

(a) Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication. The board shall establish and implement an Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication, which shall be responsible for administratively adjudicating cases of chronic truancy and imposing appropriate sanctions. The board shall appoint or employ hearing officers to perform the adjudicatory functions of that Office. Principals and other appropriate personnel may refer pupils suspected of being chronic truants, as defined in Section 26-2a of this Code, to the Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication.

(b) Notices. Before any hearing may be held 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 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 a hearing procedure as provided under subsection (c) and clearly describing any and all possible penalties that may be imposed as provided for in subsections (d) and (e) of this Section.

(c) Hearing. Once a pupil has been referred to the Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication, a hearing shall be scheduled before an appointed hearing officer, and the pupil and the pupil's parents or guardian shall be notified by certified mail, return receipt requested stating the time, place, and purpose of the hearing. The hearing officer shall hold a hearing and render a written decision within 14 days determining whether the pupil is a chronic truant as defined in Section 26-2a of this Code and whether the parent or guardian took reasonable steps to assure the pupil's attendance at school. The hearing shall be private unless a public hearing is requested by the pupil's parent or guardian, and the pupil may be present at the hearing with a representative in addition to the pupil's parent or guardian. The board shall present evidence of the pupil's truancy, and the pupil and the parent or guardian or representative of the pupil may cross examine witnesses, present witnesses and evidence, and present defenses to the charges. All testimony at the hearing shall be taken under oath administered by the hearing officer. The decision of the hearing officer shall constitute an "administrative decision" for purposes of judicial review under the Administrative Review Law.

(d) Penalties. The hearing officer may require the pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian or both the pupil and the pupil's parent or guardian to do any or all of the following: perform reasonable school or community services for a period not to exceed 30 days; complete a parenting education program; obtain counseling or other supportive services; and comply with an individualized educational plan or service plan as provided by appropriate school officials. If the parent or guardian of the chronic truant shows that he or she took reasonable steps to insure attendance of the pupil at school, he or she shall not be required to perform services.

(e) Non-compliance with sanctions. If a pupil determined by a hearing officer to be a chronic truant or the parent or guardian of the pupil fails to comply with the sanctions ordered by the hearing officer under subsection (c) of this Section, the Office of Chronic Truant Adjudication may refer the matter to the State's Attorney for prosecution under Section 3-33.5 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.

(f) Limitation on applicability. Nothing in this Section shall be construed to apply to a parent or guardian of a pupil not required to attend a public school pursuant to Section 26-1.

(Source: P.A. 94-1011, eff. 7-7-06.)

Section 1.290 Absenteeism and Truancy Policies

a) Purpose

This Section establishes guidelines and criteria required by Section 26-13 of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/26-13], which provides that *school districts shall adopt absenteeism and truancy policies identifying appropriate supportive services and available resources for truants and chronic truants.*

b) Content of Policies

Each school district shall develop an absenteeism and truancy policy including at least the following elements:

- 1) A definition of a valid cause for absence in accordance with Section 26-2a of the School Code;
- 2) A description of diagnostic procedures to be used for identifying the causes of unexcused student absenteeism, which shall, at a minimum, include interviews with the student, his or her parents or guardians, and any school officials or other parties who may have information about the reasons for the student's attendance problem; and
- 3) The identification of supportive services to be made available to truant or chronically truant students. These services shall include, but need not be limited to, parent conferences, student counseling, family counseling, and information about existing community services which are available to truant and chronically truant students and relevant to their needs.

(Source: Amended at 29 Ill. Reg. 15789, effective October 3, 2005)