

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Dale Kooyenga
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator Kooyenga:

This letter is in response to your March 9, 2021 correspondence requesting any information the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has on attendance changes or absenteeism among public school students in Wisconsin and what the department is doing to address absenteeism.

The DPI has current summary attendance data for this school year, however, that data is snapshotted and certified on an annual basis through the DPI's WISEdata Attendance Collection. The snapshot for the attendance data from the 2020-21 school year is scheduled for December 7, 2021. After that date, the DPI finalizes our review and work to publish the data as quickly as possible. School districts track more granular data, however, and schools work every day to keep students engaged, monitoring attendance and performance.

Attendance policies, including definitions around excused and unexcused absences, are set by school boards and vary across districts. Many school districts made changes to how they collected attendance data due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the department laid out options for school districts to consider in collecting this data at the beginning of the school year.

A primary purpose of tracking student attendance is to gauge the ability of every student to access needed educational resources and to examine student engagement. As with in-person educational delivery, schools using virtual instruction delivery models are encouraged to examine attendance to help identify when additional supports are needed. In doing so, schools are encouraged by DPI to use trauma sensitive practices and focus on the foundational role relationships play in creating positive conditions for learning and a sense of belonging.

Monitoring a student's attendance is a first step but working with the student's family and other educators in the building should also be planned, and DPI has provided resources to schools from [Attendance Works](#) as well as providing DPI-developed materials and supports. Further, the DPI recommends schools work with community partners through collaborations between child welfare, local law enforcement, and youth justice in order to provide greater access to resources and more effective services for students and families.

The DPI has also provided considerations for school districts related to state laws and policies that impact attendance, such as truancy laws and policies, disenrollment, seat time, and flexible scheduling.

Data is leveraged by the DPI to address attendance. The DPI provides data tools for local data to be reviewed at the local level through a secure dashboard titled WISEdash for Districts, where

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school districts can use the dashboards to view student attendance. It offers attendance dashboards and Absenteeism Early Warning dashboards. Districts are provided three dashboards to view attendance data: Attendance Rate by Subgroup, Attendance Rate - All Subgroups, and Average Daily Attendance. Attendance rate trend charts provide local school districts a comparison of the attendance rates for each year for the most recent five years. The rate for the current year (2020-21) on these charts is complete after all attendance data has been reported. This will occur during the December 7, 2021 snapshot.

Chronic absenteeism is highly correlated with low student achievement and is a strong predictor of whether a student will fail to graduate. The Absenteeism Early Warning dashboard on WISEdash for Districts is designed to assist districts in identifying students who may be at risk of being chronically absent so educators can intervene quickly. This dashboard displays the proportion of students at risk for being chronically absent in a school or district. Risk levels are broken down into three levels:

- High risk: Students with 10 or more absences in the given school year
- Medium risk: Students with at least 6 days absent but less than 10
- Low risk: Students with fewer than 6 days absent

Student absences from the entire current school year, regardless of a student's current school of enrollment, are used to determine the risk levels.

The Absenteeism Early Warning dashboard includes three graphs. The first graph shows the proportion of students in a school or district in each absenteeism risk level in the current year. The other two graphs show prior year trends of high risk absenteeism rates.

In addition to this dashboard, schools are encouraged to combine a student's chronic absenteeism risk level with additional data tools developed by the DPI through the Dropout Early Warning System ([DEWS](#)) and College and Career Early Warning System ([CCREWS](#)) individual student scores, as well as current local and contextual information to craft an action plan.

In addition to the dashboards available securely to public school districts, data on attendance is also reported publicly via the [WISEdash Public Portal](#). Members of the public may view the attendance data by going to the Student Engagement tab and then selecting Attendance-Dropouts. As an example, if Attendance-Dropouts Trends is selected you would see data for the most recent five years, including the data we recently captured and reported publicly from the 2019-20 school year, for Attendance Rate, Dropout Rate, and Absenteeism Rate.

Please contact Grant Huber, Legislative Liaison, at grant.huber@dpi.wi.gov should you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Mike Thompson, PhD
Deputy State Superintendent

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