



**DALE KOOYENGA**  
STATE SENATOR · 5<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

State Capitol · P.O. Box 7882 · Madison, WI 53707-7882 · (608) 266-2512

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March 9, 2021

Dr. Carolyn Stanford Taylor, State Superintendent  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
125 S. Webster Street  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Dr. Stanford Taylor,

I am writing to express my concern about the number of students in Wisconsin who may have “fallen off the grid” during the virtual education era, and to offer any legislative assistance the Department might need to address this.

The rate of absenteeism among K-12 students following the adoption of virtual education has recently made [national news](#). According to a [study](#) by Bellwether Education Partners, approximately 3 million educationally marginalized students nationwide may have “fallen off the radar” since the school closures that started last March. The Bellwether study [estimates](#) that anywhere from 770 to nearly 20,000 Wisconsin students could be at risk.

The Bellwether study relies on estimates to analyze the possible extent of the problem state-by-state. As noted by ABC News, not all states have data available on the number of students who have stopped participating in their formal education over the past year. However, their report indicates this is a nationwide problem.

I am requesting any information the Department has on attendance changes or absenteeism among public school students in Wisconsin, especially over the past year, if available.

I am also requesting to know what the Department is doing to address potential absenteeism, given the greater ease with which students can fail to attend class when their instruction is virtual. Please provide the information requested above by Wednesday, March 31, 2021. If there is no effort to quantify and address this possible problem, please explain why not.

I am reaching out in good faith, out of concern for the educational status of potentially tens of thousands of students for whom a formal education is most critical. To that end, I offer any assistance my office may be able to provide in collecting this information and addressing any absenteeism problems over the past year.

Children skipping class is nothing new. However, last year’s move to all-virtual education may have presented a unique opportunity to at least some students to skip an entire school year or substantial portions of it. Additionally, some students from economically

disadvantaged families may not have the means to attend school virtually even if they wanted to. It is my hope that we can work together to identify and address this problem.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dale P. Kooyenga" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dale P. Kooyenga  
Wisconsin State Senator  
5<sup>th</sup> Senate District