The Root of Chronic Absenteeism/Truancy Begins in Early Childhood

IASSW Conference
October 19, 2017
Our Vision: Regional Collaboration to Raise Educational Attainment

The *Illinois P-20 Council’s* goal is to increase the proportion of adults in Illinois with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025.

The *Northern Illinois Regional P-20 Network* collaborates to increase college and career success for our students through regional action toward the 60 x 2025 goal.
Our P-20 Network Commitment: Shared Problems and Shared Solutions

**Problems our educational system is facing**
- Different expectations for students
- Lack of consistency across institutions
- Low completion of post-secondary programs
- Shortage of skilled workers

**Solutions our P20 Network is implementing**
- Vertical collaboration and communication
- System-level tools and activities
- Community-based action

http://niu.edu/p20network
## 45 Participating Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Colleges</th>
<th>School Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of DuPage</td>
<td>Naperville 203, DuPage ROE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Lake County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elgin Community College</td>
<td>Elgin U-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper College</td>
<td>Arlington Heights HS 214, Barrington HS 220, Palatine HS 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Community College</td>
<td>Freeport 145, ROE 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois Valley Community College</td>
<td>Seneca Township HS 160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishwaukee College</td>
<td>DeKalb 428, Rochelle HS 212, Sycamore 427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHenry County College</td>
<td>Huntley 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Valley College</td>
<td>Rockford 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauk Valley Community College</td>
<td>River Bend 2, Rock Falls 301, Sterling 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waubonsee Community College</td>
<td>Hinckley-Big Rock 429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Education Agencies and Organizations

- IL Board of Higher Education
- IL Community College Board
- IL State Board of Education
- IL Student Assistance Commission
- IL P-20 Council
- IL Dept. of Employment Services
- IL Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
- IL Workforce Investment Board
- IL Office of the Governor
- Northern Illinois University
- University Center of Lake County
- Advance Illinois
- IL Action for Children
- IL Business Roundtable
- Voices for Illinois Children
Northern Illinois Regional P-20 CEOs
Monitor and Direct Five Work Groups and Action Teams in All Sectors

- Birth-3rd Grade
- Alignment of Standards
- Student Support Services
- Articulation & Adult Learners
- Workforce Development
Regional P-20 Network Focus: Early Childhood, Where Success Starts

Shared Problems from Birth-3rd Grade

- Almost 90% of children in poverty will not be ready for college coursework.
- The Early Catastrophe: between low-income and high-income children, we find a 30-Million Word Gap by age 3.
- School to Prison Pipeline: Students reading below grade level in 3rd grade are 6x more likely to drop out; high school drop outs are 63x more likely to be incarcerated.
- Almost 100 organizations receive local, state, national, and private funds to implement B-3 programs.
Does our current educational system function like Napoleon’s Campaign in Russia?
### Impact of Poverty on Our Children

#### Poverty's Impact in Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Indicators</th>
<th>Deafness delays</th>
<th>Child stressed</th>
<th>Child health/vitality</th>
<th>Unsafe neighborhood</th>
<th>Child not flourishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in Poverty</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Poverty</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morn Indicators</th>
<th>Mom in poor mental health</th>
<th>Parent in poor mental health</th>
<th>Mom in poor health</th>
<th>Parent less than high school</th>
<th>Single parent (or cohabitating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in Poverty</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Poverty</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Young Children in Deep Poverty, National Center for Children in Poverty (2016), in poverty defined as <100% Federal Poverty Level.

**National members

#### Poverty's Impact in Educational Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on ages</th>
<th>9-10</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>17-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Not Proficient in Reading</td>
<td>Not Proficient in Reading</td>
<td>Not Proficient in Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Poverty</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Poverty</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<th>9-10</th>
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<tr>
<td>Not Proficient in Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Poverty</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Poverty</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>89%</td>
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*National Assessment of Educational Progress Data, Illinois Class of 2013. Poor defined as eligible for National School Lunch.

**Illinois Class of 2013


Illinois EC Infrastructure is Complex.

Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD), 2016.
Birth to Five Programs and Funding Streams are Complex.

- **US Department of Health and Human Services**
  - Head Start/Early Head Start
    - Child Care Assistance Program
    - Early Intervention
    - Better Birth Outcomes
    - Family Case Management
    - Healthy Families
      - Parents Too Soon
    - High Risk Infant Follow Up
    - MIECHV Program
    - Migrant and Seasonal Head Start
    - Perinatal Depression
    - RTT-ELC
    - Refugee and Immigrant Services
    - SNAP
    - TANF
    - Teen Parent Services
    - WIC (USDA funded)
  - IL Department of Human Services
    - Children with Special Health Care Needs
      - Family Planning/Title X Family Planning
      - Genetics/Newborn Metabolic Screening
      - Immunizations
      - Lead Program
      - Newborn Hearing Screening
      - Subsequent Pregnancy Project
  - IL Department of Public Health
    - All Kids
    - Medicaid
    - Moms and Babies
  - IL Healthcare and Family Services
    - Child Protective Services
    - Early Childhood Project
    - Licensing
    - Office of School Readiness

- **IL Board of Education**
  - Early Childhood Block Grant (Preschool for All & Prevention Initiative)
  - Preschool Development Grant
  - Title I
  - CACFP/School Lunch (USDA)

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- **IL Department of Child and Family Services**
  - Child Protective Services
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- **Schools and Community-Based Programs**

- **Children and Families**

**LEGEND**
- Federal Funds
- State Funds
- Blended Funds

This slide was adapted by OECD from materials developed by consultants Jeanna Capito and Karen Yarbrough.
Early Childhood: Shared Solutions

**Northern Illinois P20 Network Birth-3rd Grade Supports and Resources**

- 211 in all counties to improve access to services and providers
- Blockfest® parent education events to build early math and science skills
- Community Systems Development with DeKalb County Community Foundation Crib to Career Work Group
- Early Childhood Absenteeism awareness across the state
Early Childhood: Shared Solutions

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- *Early Childhood Absenteeism awareness across the state*
Why Focus on Early Childhood Absenteeism?

Absenteeism from early childhood education programs receives little attention and we don’t fully understand the causes.

- Almost 1 in 5 DC preschoolers had more than 10 unexcused absences in 2013, according to a study released in May 2014 by DC Action for Children, a nonprofit that focuses on disadvantaged children in DC. Students in grades 1-5 had a 7% truancy rate and grades 6-8 had an 8% truancy rate.

- In a Chicago study of 1229 preschool students in 2013, almost half of all 3 year olds and over one-third of 4-year-olds were chronically absent.

- More than half of all the days missed in preschool were due to children being sick (e.g., the flu, a cold, an ear infection), according to teacher logs recorded over a nine-week period (see Figure 6). However, another 18 percent of days missed were due to a range of logistical obstacles for families (represented by the green slices in Figure 6). These included difficulties getting children to and from school, child care issues, and multiple family-related matters (including a sick family member, WIC visits, court appearances, siblings with a day off from school).

- Children whose parents stated that attendance in preschool only somewhat mattered or did not matter much at all had the highest absence rates, with an average of 13.2 percent. Not all recognized that regular attendance in preschool was as important as regular attendance in later grades.
The impacts of being chronically absent result in long term issues that affect a child’s ability to stay on track throughout their schooling.

- Studies have shown that chronic absenteeism in preschool is correlated with academic problems later on, especially if those children are low-income. A study done in Baltimore showed that 25% of the students who were chronically absent in pre-K and kindergarten were held back in 3rd grade, as compared to 9% of other students.

- In Chicago, students who missed a lot of preschool scored lower on a kindergarten readiness test and had lower reading scores at the end of 2nd grade. The study also found that kids who are absent a lot in preschool are more likely to be chronically absent in later grades.

- Also in the Chicago study, children with the lowest skills were absent the most—about 44 percent of students with low initial letter-word identification skills were chronically absent in preschool at age four, compared with 28 percent of students with high initial letter-word identification skills.

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This is especially true for children living in poverty, who are already at risk for educational delays, and are four times more likely to be chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2014).

- A Chicago study found that chronic absenteeism is higher among students who live in high-poverty neighborhoods than among students who live in moderate- or low-poverty neighborhoods. Even after the neighborhood poverty was taken into account, African American preschool students are still much more likely to be chronically absent than students of any other race/ethnicity.

- On average, controlling for student characteristics, attendance is better in safe schools, in schools where trust between parents and teachers is strong, where parents are involved in school, and where school commitment is high among teachers.
Effects of Chronic Absenteeism in Preschool

- Children may never realize the potential of their early childhood programs if they are absent. (Ehrlich et al., 2014)

- Absenteeism habits are carried into K-12th grade; chronically absent preschoolers are 5 times more likely to be chronically absent in 2nd grade. (Ehrlich et al., 2014)

- Chronic absenteeism carried into K-12th grade can mean that children who are ready for Kindergarten lose the gains they made from their early childhood programs. (Attendance Works, 2011).
Questions for your elbow partners

- What do you know about the absenteeism rates of children in your preschool programs?
- How would your community respond to a campaign to raise awareness about early childhood absenteeism?
Early Childhood Absenteeism Survey

- Northern Illinois P20 Network Region with some statewide distribution
- Survey questions about
  - Characteristics of their programs (locations, staff numbers, etc)
  - Program guidelines/policies
  - Consequences for poor attendance
  - Documented Rates of Absenteeism
  - Most Common Reasons for Absenteeism
  - Most Successful Ways of Addressing Absenteeism
  - Forms of Intervention - Successes and Challenges
Characteristics of the respondents

- 73 Respondents with enrollments ranging from a few students to 2400
- 68 Respondents with staff numbers from 1 to 200
- 71 Respondents recorded 49 different zip codes
- 71 Respondents about location with 1 City of Chicago, 7 Suburban Cook County, and 63 “other county”
- 69 Respondents about program purpose with 20 reporting child care, 1 reporting faith affiliate, 9 Head Start/Early Head Start, 1 Montessori, 22 preschool, 12 school district 1, special education coop, and 3 other.
Program Attendance Guidelines

- 52 of 68 respondents (76%) indicated they have attendance guidelines
  - Call parent after 2-3 days of absence
  - Some required a Drs note
  - Mentioned requiring 75-80-85% attendance for reimbursement (with 80% per month being referred to as “required by state”)
  - Many referred to their school district’s attendance/truancy process
  - Children dropped after 10 days of consecutive absence (with one program listing 21 days)
  - A few refer to family engagement/support personnel
Program Attendance Consequences

- 23 of 65 respondents (36%) reported having consequences
- Common consequences listed include-
  - Attendance contract with parent
  - Create an action plan with the family
  - Transportation eliminated
  - Truancy office referral
  - Removed from program
  - Placed back on the waiting list
Documented Absenteeism

Data reported was from September 1, 2016-November 30, 2016

Percent of Absences Reported for Children Enrolled Full Time

- **Child care**
- **Head Start**
- **Preschool**
- **School district**

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Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of the sessions. Results showed that all 4 types of programs had more than \( \frac{1}{3} \) rd of the absences reported as chronically absent.

Percent of absences reported for children 5 days a week as less than or more than 10%

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Most common reasons for absences

List of most common reasons

- Illness (46)
- Family Situation* (29)
- Vacation (16)
- Lack of transportation (11)
- No reason (4)
- Weather, Appointment, etc. (3)

* Family situation includes: relative visiting, parent conflict, relative illness (physical and mental), money, emergencies and general “family issues”
27 of 46 respondents (59%) **do not** distribute information materials to raise awareness.

18 Respondents who do distribute materials, identified these methods:

- Enrollment/registration (16)
- Newsletter (14)
- Parent education (13)
- Home visiting materials (10)
- Open Houses (10)
- Website (8)
- Family one-on-one
- Verbally when there is a concern
- Parent teacher conferences

“The teachers were able to show the progress the child made when they were in attendance vs what information they did not receive when absent. They correlated the information presented during a child’s absences with a child’s growth in that area. Absenteeism showed that children made less progress when they consistently missed coming to school.”
Future Attendance Awareness Campaigns

32 of 45 respondents (71%) indicated there were no plans for absenteeism awareness campaigns in the future.

Why not? Several respondents said that attendance is not an issue. Others included:

- We have a preschool handbook that explains attendance and absences.
- We have not had serious cases of children missing class. I don’t have exact numbers of how many children were out, however, most of the time children are out due to illness. There is only a few instances of children missing for vacations.
- At this point, preschool is not required by law so we do not feel we can address/enforce attendance with the preschool students.
- Not on the list of board priorities.
- The parents pay tuition to attend and pay whether the children are here or not. Parents usually have a valid reason for not bringing their child.
- I would like more ways on how to educate parents on this subject.
- My fear is that parents will bring sick children to preschool/child care if they feel children must avoid being absent.
- I feel uncomfortable asking parents to bring children when they do not want to since the children are young and should spend time at home.
Attendance Intervention

28 of 45 respondents (62%) said they intervene when children are experiencing high rates of absenteeism.

Responses included:

- Parent meeting (20)
- Warning letters (11)
- Transportation work around (8)
- Case management (7)
- Parent info session, conference, contract

Some comments on the most successful interventions:

“We have started giving parents information about what their children are missing out on when not attending. Would like to make flyers detailing what absenteeism can lead to.”

“Talking! Find out why. Is the child having difficulty transitioning into a bedtime routine? If so, help them to develop a plan and support them while they implement it. Transportation difficulty? Help find a solution”
Why no intervention?

17 of 45 respondents (38%) did not intervene with attendance issues

These are some reasons given by individual respondents

- Parent reactions have been rather harsh when we have brought up the benefits of attendance
- The district is implementing attendance consequences with grades 1-12 only currently
- In need of more information. I have one family who needs intervening but they always say the student is sick, so not sure how to address this issue
- Not our business
- We have good attendance
- The old director was afraid to make parents upset
Final Comments from Respondents

- We would welcome ideas to improve attendance. Transportation would help tremendously, but so would educating parents on the importance of Preschool.
- There are some years that children are sicker than others. A simple phone call/email shows parents that we are concerned and care about their child.
- We are a residential program, so most of our children are with us every school day.
- I think that sometimes parents feel that since this is "only" preschool, it is okay for their child to not attend. I believe that as much as parents want their child to go to preschool they just are not recognizing the importance of attendance to make growth.
- Efforts need to continue to have parents realize that these years are just as important to their children's growth as are the kindergarten/first grade years. Parent education is an important piece of the attendance issue. The other piece is to have our politicians not only state that they value early childhood but that they also back that up with funding. Only when everyone gets the same message, and recognizes the importance of preschool, will the attendance issues change!
- I feel that there is not enough programs available. I tried to start up and open one myself and not one single bank will help me with having CCAP children and that IL funding is always being talked about negatively.
- Sorry I don't have quick access to the attendance data, due to the size of the program and the number of sites. I can tell you that out of our full day students, n. 200, half of them had missed 10% or greater by the end of December.
Conversations with your elbow partners

- What did the survey find that was surprising to you?
- What did the survey find that was not surprising to you?
- What should be the next step for our work group?
Recommendation #1 - Collect statewide early childhood absenteeism data in all programs funded with public dollars.

Recommendation #2 - Focus on chronic absenteeism instead of chronic truancy statewide.

Recommendation #3. Include activities to prevent early childhood absenteeism in all state-funded preschool programs and state programs currently funded for truancy prevention.
Recommendation #4. Use absenteeism instead of attendance rate as a metric in Illinois accountability for districts from P-12th grade. DONE

Recommendation #5. Provide professional development on early identification, common causes and proven interventions for early childhood absenteeism.

Recommendation #6. Prevent absenteeism by focusing on the importance of establishing good attendance habits in early childhood with parents and community members.
Early Childhood Absenteeism

Resources


Questions?

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