

**DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT AND SPECIAL SERVICES
Wilmette Public Schools**

INFORMATION ITEM

Date: April 25, 2017

To: Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

From: Denise M. Thrasher, Ed.D.
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Subject: School Attendance Data - Revised

BACKGROUND

Attention on attendance and chronic absenteeism has expanded since the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015. Under ESSA, Illinois is making plans to use chronic absenteeism and attendance as a non-academic indicator of measuring school success and quality. During the 2014-15 school year, District 39 recognized concerning attendance patterns and started to look at chronic absent and attendance data longitudinally. Chronic absences were at a high of 7.1% during the 2014-15 school year, compared to 4% in 2003. District 39 developed a goal of increasing the rate of positive attendance through a best practice approach of utilizing attendance data to create a multi-tiered system of support and prevention. The past two years the Board of Education received reports on school attendance using percentages calculated based on number of school days and number of total students at various times of the year. This created fluctuations in the data as attendance patterns and total number of students enrolled changed as the school year progressed. Also, recently an error was discovered with the kindergarten and early childhood data. Therefore, the data going back to 2013 was updated using number of students enrolled on June 1, cumulative student absences on the last day of school, and the revised kindergarten and early childhood data. This resulted in changes in our percentages in the three categories of positive attendance, at-risk, and chronic absences.

Positive Attendance Trends 2013-2016

Positive attendance is defined as students attending school 95% of the time. With a school calendar of 180 student attendance days, students absent less than 9 school days fall into this category. Half day absences are included in this calculation. The chart below lists positive attendance rates by school and the district's average from the 2013-14 school year through last year. Percentages were calculated using the number of students enrolled as of June 1 of each school year.

Positive Attendance Trends by School

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Central	70%	66%	66%
McKenzie	69%	60%	61%
Romona	67%	67%	67%
Harper	65%	61%	63%
HMS	60%	58%	67%
WJHS	63%	67%	70%
D39 total	65%	63%	67%

Baseline information on the school attendance goal of the Strategic Plan will be updated to reflect 67% positive attendance for 2015-16. The positive attendance data from 2013-14 was further analyzed, looking at grade level trends (refer to the chart below).

Positive Attendance Trends (less than 9 absences) by Grade Level

Grade Level	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
EC	61%	53%	60%
K	58%	64%	65%
1	71%	63%	68%
2	71%	65%	63%
3	67%	63%	63%
4	70%	65%	65%
5	63%	59%	71%
6	57%	57%	63%
7	71%	70%	80%
8	55%	64%	61%
Total	65%	63%	67%

*Data collected using end of year attendance and June 1 enrollment

Chronic Absence Trends

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% of school (18 or more days absent in a year). Chronic absence data from 2013 to the end of the 2015-16 school year was analyzed by grade level. A review of chronic absence data supports the hypothesis that chronic absences are more prevalent in the older grades.

Chronic Absence Trends by Grade Level

Grade Level	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
EC	10%	19%	3.5%
K	4.3%	3.9%	2.8%
1	3.2%	7.6%	4.6%
2	2.8%	3.6%	5.4%
3	4.6%	3.7%	4.2%
4	3.3%	6.4%	5.0%
5	5.3%	6.7%	4.8%
6	11.1%	8.5%	8.4%
7	7.7%	9.9%	5.6%
8	6.6%	10.1%	11.1%
Total	5.7%	7.1%	5.9%

*Data collected using end of year attendance and June 1 enrollment

Determining the Function of Chronic Absences

Drs. Christopher Kearney and Marie Albano developed a School Refusal Assessment tool that categorizes reasons for chronic absences into four primary functions:

1. Avoidance of negative affect
2. Escape from evaluative or social situations
3. Attention seeking behaviors
4. Pursuit of tangible reinforcements

During the remainder of this school year, building level teams consisting of principals, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and teachers will utilize the School Refusal Assessment for students with concerning attendance patterns. Data collected will be reviewed to identify any trends in the root causes leading to chronic absenteeism in District 39. Information obtained will guide future staff training, parent communication, and tiered interventions.

CONCLUSION

Continued awareness about the benefits of positive attendance, providing a safe and nurturing school environment, and teaching students coping strategies needed to persevere through challenges will be essential as staff work with families to help students develop healthy attendance habits. Further attendance data will be collected and analyzed at the end of each school year using June 1 enrollment. The Board of Education can expect a full report in June with 2016-17 attendance data and recommendations for the next phase of addressing this goal.

Recommended for presentation by the Board of Education,



Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools