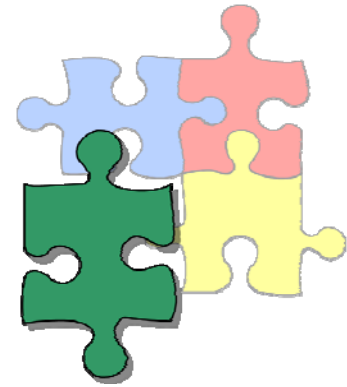


## Improving Attendance and Graduation



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### Overview

Examination of attendance and graduation rates must take into account the broad spectrum of students and their reasons for not attending school or graduating. Considerations include the level of connectedness students feel toward the school. School staff need to examine the attendance patterns of all students, from those who are absent a few days to those who are habitually truant, in order to effectively address attendance issues. When addressing improving graduation rates, school staff should begin by identifying who is at risk of not graduating and then defining a conceptual framework for addressing the problem. This includes deciding whether the approach will target specific students or specific demographic subgroups, or establish a schoolwide program.

*For a complete perspective on AYP, along with additional contacts and the entire AYP Handbook, visit:*  
[http://dpi.wi.gov/ssos/ayp\\_handbook.html](http://dpi.wi.gov/ssos/ayp_handbook.html)

### How Attendance and Graduation Rates are Calculated

Graduation rate is the number of graduates (students who receive a regular high school diploma granted by the school board) divided by the total cohort group, measured from the beginning of high school as a percentage. This cohort group includes graduates, other high school completers who did not receive a regular high school diploma granted by the school board, dropouts, and students who reached the age of 21 in the school year.

Attendance rate is the percentage of the total number of days (reported to the one-half day) of face-to-face instructional contact between a student and a teacher that actually occur during a school year divided by the total possible days. A student must be present for a minimum of one hour in any one-half day to be considered in attendance for that half day. If a school district decides a student can be present for less than one-half day and still be in attendance, it should report actual days of attendance as 0.5.

### Multiple Strategies Needed to Improve Attendance and Graduation

Improving attendance and graduation requires coordinated efforts of a variety of people and systems working together to implement strategies that address the root causes of truancy and failure. There is no simple “one size fits all” approach that will work in every community. The fundamental challenges are to engage all students in the learning process and school community and to address barriers to attendance, learning and school completion. Students experiencing problems with behavior and success can often be identified early in the elementary years. Students at risk of failing can usually be identified by the sixth grade. If additional learning supports are provided to help address barriers to learning during this period, a pattern of school engagement and success may be established and truancy and failure prevented. These learning supports often involve coordinated efforts of teachers, administrators, pupil services staff and community personnel.

Once truancy and disengagement begin, more intensive and targeted strategies may be needed. Identifying and addressing barriers to attendance for specific students are key actions. Such efforts are often lead by pupil services staff. Community partners such as law enforcement and courts may support targeted efforts by providing immediate consequences for truancy. However punitive approaches alone

are not likely to succeed and must be balanced with supporting services and perhaps alternative educational approaches. The following are some key options for addressing attendance and graduation issues.

## Short-Term Action Options

### *Make sure the data you collect and report are accurate*

Graduation and attendance rates are calculated from data submitted by the district through the Individual Student Enrollment System (ISES). Keep the Wisconsin Student Locator System current by updating records when a student moves between schools within the district or to a new district. Work with the district ISES Administrator to check data accuracy before the validation and lock down dates. For important ISES dates visit: <http://dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/isesdates.html>.



Accurate use of Exit Types is critical to accurate reporting. An exit type describes circumstances under which the student exited from a school. Refer to <http://dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/dataexit.html> for additional information. Note that students who earn an HSED and also qualify for a regular diploma issued by the school board should have an “R” Regular Diploma exit type.

Another important reference is the connection between WSLs, ISES, and WSAS Data Collection, Record Editing, and On-Line Reporting at <http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/dacdata.html>.

### *Examine the district’s definitions of truancy*

Consider revising the definition if minor tardiness results in a report of absence and truancy.

### *Make students and parents or guardians feel welcome*

Make a point to greet every student, parent and guardian you see in the halls and outside. Learn the names of your students and their families. Consider ways to meaningfully include them in the life of the school.

### *When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent or guardian*

Make a personal phone call in the evening or call parents or guardians at work during the day each and every time a student has an unexcused absence. Empower and expect classroom teachers to call parents when they think a student may be truant. Provide telephones with privacy so teachers can call parents. Encourage teachers to explain to parents that work was missed when their child was absent.

### *Recognize good attendance*

Recognize and reward students for academic achievement and attendance as you do for athletics. Reward and recognize good attendance, not just perfect attendance. Post large signs giving the daily attendance for the day. Reward individuals, classes, and the school for increased attendance.

### *Talk with students about their reasons for being absent and address the contributing factors*

It’s important to let students know that you’re aware of their absences and that you care that they’re in school. Find out why they missed school, and enlist pupil services staff to help address the wide variety of health, social, personal, and practical reasons that can lead to student absence. Pupil services staff can address these causes with direct help and links to community resources for students and families.

### *Consider temptations that may lead to truancy*

Examine data related to school absences to see if there is a correlation between truancy and open campus policies. Consider closing your campuses during breaks and lunch.

*Provide opportunities for all students to be successful in something*

Provide a wide variety of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to engage all students in the schooling experience. Use community volunteers to provide enrichment activities. Make service learning opportunities available within the curriculum.

*Utilize after-school programs, including 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (CLC) programs*

After-school and CLC programs can provide the engagement that some students need to keep them involved in school. They also offer total development of students, creating a comfortable school environment for them. Some programs may offer credit remediation.

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/clc.html>



*Conduct school climate and health risk behavior surveys to help identify barriers to attendance and engagement*

The DPI provides free, online school climate surveys for students in grades 3–12 at <http://goal.learningpt.org/winss/scs/> and a school climate survey for school staff at <http://goal.learningpt.org/winss/staff/>. DPI also provides free, online health risk behavior surveys at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/oyrbsindex.html>. The sites include suggestions for effective survey administration and clarify issues related to parent permission. Survey results may be disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, and academic achievement.

## **Long-Term Action Options**

*Identify specific students and their families and interview them on their attendance issues*

Routinely get feedback from parents or guardians about why their child is missing school. This information is invaluable to help create effective solutions. The reasons for truancy may vary widely from year to year. Do not assume the strategies you implement this year will work for every student every year. Individual counseling and small group counseling can be effective long-term measures for improving student attendance.

*Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected*

Examine safety concerns of students, including the result of health risk behavior surveys, to develop strategies that will make the school safer. Implement a bullying prevention policy and program. Use the results of school climate surveys to develop strategies that make the school more inclusive. Implement advisor/advisee or mentoring programs to ensure that each student has someone in the school who knows and cares about them. Adopt a character education program that is planned and implemented by students.

*Implement discipline consistently and fairly*

Put in place a district-wide developmentally-appropriate system of discipline that emphasizes constructive action to address behavioral issues, rather than solely punitive approaches. Ensure that the system of discipline is implemented consistently and fairly across the district. Avoid “zero tolerance means automatic expulsion” policies except where required by law for some firearm possession violations. Models such as Restorative Justice, Discipline with Dignity, and Positive Behavior Supports support effective classroom management and offer a variety of alternatives to suspension and expulsion.

<http://www.restorativejustice.org/>; <http://www.disciplineassociates.com/>; <http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>

*Address specific barriers to attendance through pupil services*

Implement a comprehensive school counseling program to assure that all students receive supports for their personal, social, academic and career development. Use a building consultation team or similar model to identify and address specific student issues. Assure that school nurses are available to help address health concerns that may interfere with attendance and success. Assure that school counselors, psychologists and social workers are available to counsel students on social and emotional issues, consult with teachers on behavioral interventions, and follow-up with students and families following truancy. Assure that school social workers are available to coordinate services with juvenile justice and other community-based services and work with families that may be disengaged from school.

*Forge relationships with businesses and other community partners to keep students in school during school hours*

Create posters that state, “We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 18 during school hours” and distribute them to local businesses where youth may congregate when truant. Examine city and county ordinances to see if they are aligned with consequences for truancy in state statutes. Empower community police officers to return youth to school.

*Focus on transition years—sixth and eighth or ninth grades*

Combine good schooling with focused interventions at the key points where students fall off track. Use a multi-tier approach. Include school-wide strategies; every unexcused absence should trigger a response. A targeted intervention—prompted, for example by two or three unexcused absences—would require the students to check in daily with an adult. An intensive intervention could involve home visits or social service supports. Identify and intervene early with any students that meet any of the key warning signs: high absence rate, consistently poor behavior reports, failing math or failing English.

*Establish alternative schools and programs to meet the needs of credit deficient or at-risk students*

Possible options for alternative schools include off-site facilities and school-within-a-school models. Encourage mentor/tutor relationships that draw upon retired educators and senior partnerships.

*Provide alternative routes for students to get a high school diploma*

A student enrolled in an alternative education program may be granted a regular high school diploma if the student earns adequate credits or if the school board determines the pupil has demonstrated a level of proficiency in the subject required under Wisconsin High School Graduation Standards (Wis. Stat. 118.33). Students who complete alternative education programs leading to a high school equivalency diploma (HSED) and other high school completion credentials are not considered high school graduates if they are not granted a high school diploma from the school district. Districts may want to consider granting a high school diploma to students enrolled in alternative education programs if they meet the requirements under Wis. Stat. 118.33.

*Help students create a four-year plan for graduation as well as postsecondary plans*

Students entering high school create a dynamic document indicating the course plan and sequence they anticipate enrolling in to meet the district’s graduation requirements, and their own postsecondary expectations.

These guidelines are adapted from  
*10 Things a School Can Do to Improve Attendance*  
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