



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Reporting Student Attendance in Different Learning Environments

Schools and districts across the state begin the 2020-21 school having engaged in unprecedented amounts of preparation and planning due to the unique health risks posed by COVID-19. This planning includes considerations related to counting and reporting student attendance. The purpose of this document is to share recommendations from the Department of Public Instruction regarding attendance policy flexibilities and policies that will best support student success during this unique time.

In considering attendance flexibilities, we revisit goals for returning to school¹, which include caring for the social-emotional and mental health needs of students and staff while keeping learning coherent amidst flexible school schedules and learning environments. To these ends, and keeping an equity focus at the heart of considerations, DPI shares these recommendations. The information below provides context and recommendations; the following table elaborates upon what districts may count as attendance in different learning environments with information for when and how to report this attendance. When possible, we have provided resources and highlighted equity considerations for districts. This document will be updated as new information or promising practice emerges.

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[Updates to the document will be dated here.]

Why attendance?

Students with regular attendance (typically considered students who attend at least 90% of possible days) are more likely to perform well in English language arts and mathematics, and more likely to graduate from high school within four years. Conversely, students with lower

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Education Forward: Reopening Wisconsin Schools, page 4. Retrieved on August 18, 2020, from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/education-forward>.

attendance rates often have lower academic performance and are less likely to graduate from high school within four years. A recent Promising Practices Brief from the U.S. Department of Education captures the value of monitoring attendance well:

In addition to attendance reporting requirements, monitoring attendance serves as a critical element for assessing student engagement during extended school closures, including those as a result of COVID-19. Attending school serves as a daily wellness touchpoint for students and enables teachers and other educators to identify student wellness needs and report any concerns to the appropriate authorities. Without these daily face-to-face interactions, monitoring student attendance in remote learning during extended school closures serves as the primary means for ensuring student well-being in a time of unprecedented disruption to home and family life.²

DPI Recommendation

The recommendation of the Department of Public Instruction is that schools and districts establish a practice of daily check-in/attendance taking for students in both in-person and virtual learning environments. This recommendation is based upon equity values by which we work collectively to remain focused on how our work accelerates growth and positive change for learners who most need it, while increasing opportunities for all, and which prompt us to consider the intentional and unintentional consequences of our decisions on institutionally underserved and under-resourced populations. It also recognizes another goal for returning to school³, to meet the needs of every student by considering the unique experiences of students and by considering students' families as active partners in learning. To this end, it is important to recognize the different events or evidence that may count as attendance.

Attendance Options by Learning Environment

Learning Environment	What counts ⁴	How to Report	When to report	Resources & Equity Considerations
In Person	Student is in the building	Standard/historical reporting practices and guidance apply.	Daily	WISEdata: attendance data element
Virtual Synchronous	Learning Management System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of daily work 	Attendance may be reported in half- or full-day increments, depending upon local policy.	DPI recommends that a school	Districts may Attendance want to review this Fostering

² Chambers, D., Scala, J., English, D (July 2020). Promising Practices Brief: Improving Student Engagement and Attendance During COVID-19 School Closures, (5). Retrieved from: https://insightpolicyresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NSAES_COVID19_Whitepaper_Final_508.pdf.

³ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Education Forward: Reopening Wisconsin Schools, page 4. Retrieved on August 18, 2020, from: <http://dpi.wi.gov/education-forward>.

⁴ Kennedy, K. (2019). WDLC Case Study Series: Online Attendance. Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative. Retrieved from <https://www.wiwdlc.org/case-studies/>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of assignment, module, exam • System log-in • Submission of assignment • Other analytics such as weekly progress reports <p>Attendance taken in synchronous event(s) -student is present during event. -educator collects evidence that student accessed the event (if recorded).</p> <p>Contact logs</p> <p>Pacing charts or adequate course progress</p> <p>Activity logs</p> <p>Daily check-in with student (virtual meeting, email connection, phone)</p> <p>Regular (weekly) check-ins with parents/guardians</p>	<p>This policy may differ by grade level or range.</p> <p>Check-ins or other student-educator meetings: In any given day, a check-in or student-educator meeting may count as a synchronous event; participation in the event counts as attendance for that course for the day.</p>	<p>enter daily attendance for students, correcting any entries at the end of the week, if there are any updates to attendance records based upon assignment completion, check-ins, or LMS access.</p> <p>DPI will capture official attendance data for 2020-21 in December 2021, as part of the Year End WISEdata snapshot.</p>	<p>Innovation Guide and/or this Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative Brief to inform local planning for synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning.</p>
Virtual asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work completed • Check-ins or other student-educator events 	<p>Work completed: In any given day, a student completing an assignment for a course may be considered to have attended that course for the day. If the student partially</p>	<p>DPI recommends that schools enter attendance daily, providing</p>	<p>Based upon current plans, significant portions of institutionally underserved and under-resourced populations will be in these learning environments this</p>

		<p>completes the assignment, the student would have partial attendance for the day.</p> <p>Schools that provide packets of work should consider what information should accompany the work in order for students and parents to understand 1) what the assignment/s is/are; 2) when and how the school/educator will collect each assignment; and 3) how much of the packet counts as a daily or weekly amount of work. These decisions should translate into what counts as attendance and when attendance reporting is updated in local SIS.</p> <p>Check-ins or other student-educator meetings: In any given day, a check-in or student-educator meeting may be used to confirm participation in an asynchronous event; participation in the event counts as attendance for that course for the day.</p>	<p>corrections as appropriate on a weekly basis.</p> <p>If a school or district elects to report attendance in different intervals (weekly or longer), understand that WISEdash for Districts reports data updated on a nightly basis and may not be accurate if local reporting differs from the daily updates.</p>	<p>school year. Attendance matters. How will districts ensure that students - especially those that are institutionally underserved and under-resourced - are engaged and learning in virtual asynchronous settings?</p>
<p>Other combined or blended learning</p>	<p><i>Apply the appropriate guidance for the virtual synchronous, asynchronous, or in-person scenarios, above.</i></p>			

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Tuancy in virtual and physically distanced learning delivery

The primary purpose of tracking student attendance is to gauge the ability of every student to access needed educational resources and to assess student engagement. When students miss school, they miss out on the opportunity to interact with learning materials and to connect with people in the school community. In recent interviews, some districts noted increased engagement (attendance) of families when students were able to make a personal connection with an educator by sharing something from their home life or personal interests via a video conference or phone.⁵ This reinforces the importance of regular connections between adult educators and students.

As local decision-makers craft attendance tracking structures to meet state and federal reporting requirements, needed updates to habitual truancy practices will become clearer. Habitual truancy remains defined by state statute ([Wis. Stat. § 118.16](#)) as when a pupil is absent from school without an acceptable excuse for part or all of 5 or more days on which school is held during a school semester. In Wisconsin truancy law, district policy largely determines what counts as excused or unexcused absences as well as what counts as a partial day. Attendance policy must take into consideration new local definitions of “absent” in physically distanced and virtual⁶ modes of instruction, including what constitutes a part or whole day absence in the learning context, with consideration of possible changes to service delivery throughout the school year. Districts will need to plan not only because the basic requirement of compulsory school attendance remains in effect⁷, but also because of the known benefits for students of regular access to the academic instruction and the social-emotional supports expertly provided by caring educators. Schools track attendance closely to help staff identify when the provided resources are not meeting student needs and work collaboratively with students, caregivers, and community partners to remove barriers to success.

Schools should not work alone in reducing habitual truancy and its impact on student learning. Proactive discussions between child serving agencies can lead to creative interventions for supporting students and families in connecting with school staff and engaging with their learning. Collaborations between child welfare, local law enforcement, and youth justice have shown promising results across Wisconsin. Such partnerships can lead to more equitable access to educational resources and more effective services for students and families.

⁵ Chambers, D., Scala, J., English, D (July 2020). Promising Practices Brief: Improving Student Engagement and Attendance During COVID-19 School Closures, (7). Retrieved from: https://insightpolicyresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NSAES_COVID19_Whitepaper_Final_508.pdf.

⁶ Those interested in exploring existing habitual truancy policies, including policy that already applies for virtual charter schools, may find value in this [Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative Online Attendance Brief](#).

⁷ The [COVID-19 District Flexibility Application](#) allows districts to request a waiver from the alternative enrollments provisions of Wis. Stats. § 118.15(1), (b) through (f), and the full attendance and truancy enforcement provisions of §§ 118.16 and 118.162. The foundational requirement for compulsory attendance of children ages 6 to 18 and enrolled kindergarten students under § 118.15(1)(a) and (am) cannot be waived.

Attendance Data in Continuous Improvement

While attendance looks different for some schools and districts this year, and because learning environments may change for students over the year, it will be important for school and district staff to have a plan not only for reporting attendance, but also for using attendance data to inform continuous improvement planning. Who will review attendance data for your school/district and how often? How will data flow (who else will see data; what happens when needs are identified) to best support interventions and supports that ensure students and families are re-engaged as soon as possible to minimize further disruptions to education? Having plans for reviewing data will connect efforts to collect and report attendance to actions that can improve student outcomes.