

12-2016

# Modifying Board Policy on Attendance for Alternative High School Students: A Policy Advocacy Document

Janine E. Gruhn  
*National Louis University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Gruhn, Janine E., "Modifying Board Policy on Attendance for Alternative High School Students: A Policy Advocacy Document" (2016). *Dissertations*. 203.  
<http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/203>

MODIFYING BOARD POLICY ON ATTENDANCE  
FOR ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:  
A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Janine E. Gruhn

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirement, of

Doctor of Education

In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

December 2016

Copyright by Dr. Janine E. Gruhn, December 31, 2016  
All Rights Reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Norm Weston, who has taught and encouraged me throughout my educational program at National-Louis University. Dr. Weston served as the chair of my dissertation committee and during the process has provided me with guidance, and support. His endless hours of work are truly appreciated and were a source of inspiration. I also greatly appreciate the committee co-chair, Dr. Jack Denny, for his efforts. He provided feedback from the educational standpoint and was able to view the work I was doing through the lens of not only a professor, but also a school administrator. Dr. Weston and Dr. Denny your comments, suggestions, and critical eye for detail were essential to my work.

My husband Ray and daughter Kaylee should also be commended for their understanding and support throughout the three years of the doctoral program. They have been my cheerleaders, my shoulders to lean on, and, continuous source of laughter. I am a lucky wife and mother to have such a wonderful family. Additionally, I thank my mom, who committed to watching my daughter during the time I was in school and my entire family for their support and encouragement.

I also want to acknowledge the National-Louis University faculty who provided me with the means to achieve my goals. As well as the Cohort for their support and my lunch group, who shared laughs, stories from the field, and always helped problem solve. A special thank you to all participants, who generously gave their time to support this research; without them this research study would not have been possible. Lastly, thank you to Dr. Mary Lamping for her encouragement to join the doctoral program and her commitment to supervising my internship.

My work is dedicated in loving memory to my dad, William J. Brill, who was my biggest fan and taught me to always advocate for what I believe in. In addition, to my family, who inspire me each day, make me laugh, and understand my joy of learning.

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership Ed.D is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice.

The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

#### Works Cited

- Browder, L.H. (1995). An alternative to the doctoral dissertation: The policy advocacy concept and the policy document. *Journal of School Leadership*, 5, 40-69.
- Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Shulman, L.S., Golde, C.M., Bueschel, A.C., & Garabedian, K.J. (2006). Reclaiming education’s doctorates: A critique and a proposal. *Educational Researcher*, 35(3), 25-32.
- Wagner, T., et al. (2006). *Change leadership: A practical guide to transforming our schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Ba

## ABSTRACT

This proposed policy advocates for students in alternative high school programs to have flexible school day schedules according to Illinois State Board of Education compulsory attendance laws. Students in alternative high school programs are often referred for chronic truancy. Most school board policies state that all students need to attend school for the entire 300 minutes of the instructional day because when students do not attend for a full day or a half-day (150 minutes) the district is penalized in the amount of general state aid. This is all too often the case with students enrolled in a district's high school alternative program. To address this issue, this policy advocates for a flexible schedule. With a modified attendance policy, students would be able to attend school for 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental services to meet their needs. By having a flexible school day schedule, alternative high school programs can not only focus on attendance, but also develop the skills students need to be college and career ready. The flexibility in scheduling will also increase the funding for school districts because a full day of instruction can be reported based on the fact that the student is receiving 180 minutes per day of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental services, rather than just reporting a half day of attendance or losing a day for no attendance at all.

## PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

During the development of an alternative program for students with special education needs, I have learned that many students are referred to the alternative program based on truancy or attendance concerns. Having a smaller environment that focuses on building relationships with the student is helpful in getting the student to school; however, there are many students who will still struggle no matter what supports are in place. I have found over the years that students who are not attending school do not attend for reasons that range from social emotional concerns, to having to work to support the family.

Students in alternative programs need to be present in school, but the experience needs to be individualized. One student may need to focus on the core academics to earn credits and other students may need to focus on independent living skills in order to obtain a job. Throughout my tenure as a Director of Special Education, I have found that we need to think out of the box for each student, which includes having a flexible schedule. ISBE regulations allow for flexible schedules each day as long as a student receives 180 minutes of instructions and 120 minutes of supplemental instructional in the areas of work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life-skills, conflict resolution, or service learning. Therefore, as we review board policy it is important to include this information to ensure individual needs of our students can be met.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT.....  | i  |
| PREFACE: LESSONS LEARNED.....                              | ii |
| SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT.....                         | 1  |
| Introduction.....  | 1  |
| Critical Issues .....                                      | 4  |
| Recommended Policy.....                                    | 7  |
| Envisioned Effect of the Policy.....                       | 7  |
| SECTION TWO: SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED.....            | 10 |
| Educational Analysis.....                                  | 13 |
| Economic Analysis.....                                     | 14 |
| Political Analysis.....                                    | 14 |
| <i>Compliance</i> .....                                    | 14 |
| <i>Direct/Authorize Superintendent Staff Members</i> ..... | 15 |
| <i>Establish Processes</i> .....                           | 16 |
| <i>Providing Information</i> .....                         | 16 |
| Social Analysis.....                                       | 18 |
| Moral and Ethical Analysis.....                            | 20 |
| SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT.....             | 20 |
| <i>Goals and Objectives</i> .....                          | 20 |
| <i>Alternative Schools Addressed in Board Policy</i> ..... | 21 |
| <i>Flexible Schedule</i> .....                             | 21 |
| <i>Individualized Plan</i> .....                           | 21 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Needs, Values, and Preferences.....                      | 21 |
| SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT.....                       | 23 |
| Argument.....  | 23 |
| Counter Argument.....                                    | 26 |
| SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.....            | 29 |
| Introduction.....  | 29 |
| Introducing the Board Policy.....                        | 29 |
| <i>Present the Policy To The Board of Education.....</i> | 30 |
| <i>Present the Policy To Staff.....</i>                  | 30 |
| <i>Present the Policy To Parents and Community.....</i>  | 30 |
| <i>Present the Policy to Students.....</i>               | 31 |
| Professional Development Activities.....                 | 31 |
| Time Schedules.....                                      | 34 |
| Program Budgets.....                                     | 36 |
| Progress Monitoring Activities.....                      | 37 |
| <i>Attendance.....</i>                                   | 37 |
| <i>Supplementary Activities.....</i>                     | 38 |
| <i>Academic Achievement.....</i>                         | 38 |
| SECTION SIX: ASSESSMENT PLAN.....                        | 39 |
| Introduction.....  | 39 |
| Implementation Monitoring.....                           | 39 |
| <i>Students.....</i>                                     | 39 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Teachers.....  | 39 |
| Outcomes.....  | 40 |
| SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT.....   | 43 |
| Introduction.....  | 43 |
| Appropriateness.....   | 44 |
| References.....  | 45 |
| <b>Tables:</b>   |    |
| Table 1: Professional Development Activities and Timelines.....                      | 31 |
| Table 2: Schedule for Adopting and Implementing Revised Board Attendance Policy..... | 34 |
| Table 3: Costs of Implementing Revised Policy.....                                   | 36 |
| Table 4: Assessment Plan to Monitor Effectiveness of Board Policy.....               | 39 |

## SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

### Introduction

Picture an alternative program that provides individual supports for students including two special education teachers, two social workers and two paraprofessionals per 26 students. The program is able to provide intensive interventions, social work services, individualized academic instruction, and a 6 ½ -hour school day for which all students are required to attend. The individual needs of all students are being met. This is ideal.

However, students referred to alternative programs typically have attendance, social emotional and academic issues. Goals of alternative program are to intervene based on the student's individual needs, assist the student in earning graduation credits and help the student attend on a regular basis. Of the three concerns, one of the most significant concerns is attendance. If the students are not attending they cannot learn or progress both academically or socially or emotionally. The hope is that by placing the student in the alternative school setting with more supports, they will perform better academically and behaviorally and want to come to school more often.

The alternative program is considered a second chance for the student who did not succeed in the traditional program. However, there is a problem: the students are still expected to have the same attendance requirements they had in the traditional school, and the board policy does not offer any flexibility.

Both Federal and State laws require students attend a mandatory number of days and hours during the school year. In Illinois, the school code for compulsory attendance laws are extensive. A chronic truant in the school code is defined as a child who is

subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days. Since the definition of a chronic truant is only 5% of the total number of school days, a student can only have 5 unexcused absences (105 ILCS 5/26-1).

The Illinois School Code also states that students between the ages of 7 and 17 must be in attendance unless they physically or mentally cannot attend, a child who is necessarily and lawfully employed only needs to attend 8 hours a day, children 12-14 attending confirmation classes are excused during those classes, and students can be excused for religious purposes (105 ILCS 5/26-2). Truancy often occurs because of frequent illness, the student supports the family by providing childcare or works, education is not valued by the family, or there are other significant issues facing the student.

Students with chronic truant issues are often sent to alternative programs to work on his or her attendance. In doing so, they are provided additional supports in a smaller setting which encourages the student to attend more frequently, earn credits, and graduate from school. However, if a Board Policy does not offer flexibility in the attendance policy for students who attend an alternative school and the schedule is the same as the traditional schools, the result will be the same.

The problem became apparent to me after doing a program evaluation on the effectiveness of transitioning students back to the high school from an alternative program as well as a leadership change project in which I researched the college and career readiness of students in alternative program. In both projects, the attendance rate over a three-year period in a special education alternative program was at about 75%

(Gruhn, 2016). Even with the student-teacher ratio 1: 10, the supports were intense and many attendance interventions were in place for the students. However, what was not in place for the students was a deviation from the regular attendance day of 6 ½hours and flexibility from the general schedule.

When I looked into this further, I realized that the District had a Board Policy (6010) about compulsory attendance that reflected Illinois School Code, but it did not address an attendance policy for students in alternative settings that needed intensive interventions, which is allowable under the school code. After, I noticed that there was no board policy regarding alternative schools and attendance for students with IEPs. I looked into Illinois' General State Aid funding to determine if funding is a driving force in the compulsory attendance laws and how it would affect the school district if students were not attending on a regular basis or had a flexible schedule.

According to the general state aid rules and regulations, a full day of attendance for students in grades 2nd through 12 must be a minimum of five clock hours (300 minutes). A full day of attendance for students in full-day Kindergarten or 1st grade must be four clock hours (240 minutes). On a regular school day, students in grades 2nd through 12 that receive less than 300 minutes of instruction but at least 150 minutes of instruction can be claimed for a half-day of attendance. On a regular school day, students in full-day Kindergarten or 1st grade that receive less than 240 minutes of instruction but at least 120 minutes of instruction can be claimed for a half- day of attendance. At this time, the District is reporting the General State Aid using either a half day or full day of student attendance, which is based on the Illinois School Code 105 ILCS 5/18-8.05(F)(1), (F)(2)(b), 5/18-12 and 5/10-22.34

The frequently asked questions document from the Illinois State Board of Education, states that for alternative programs, a school district may provide 180 minutes of instruction a day with an additional 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of: supplementary services, without-limitation, work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning. In addition, this section states that the State Board has the authority to approve a District plan that does not meet the required number of days and hours if it cannot meet the needs of a program or individual students.

Therefore, alternative schools still require 300 minutes of instruction per day; however, the way the instruction is delivered can be flexible compared to a traditional school. In addition, if the 300 minutes per day of instruction does not meet the needs of the students, a district can submit a plan to the Illinois State Board for approval. At this time, the District is not taking advantage of the flexible scheduling for the special education alternative program in order to collect the general state aid. (105 ILCS 5/13B-45, 13B-50 )

#### Critical Issues

Compulsory attendance laws and the policy of collecting general state aid based on student attendance has produce critical issues that require a change to the current board Policy. The current board policy does not offer any flexibility for scheduling in the alternative programs . Students in the special education alternative program are struggling to meet the attendance requirements, which have affected their ability to transition back to high school and to develop all of the necessary skills to be college and career ready.

The compulsory attendance laws stated in the current Board Policy require a student to attend school on a regular basis unless excused. Unexcused absences can only account for a total of 5% of 180 total school days per year. According to ISBE guidance documents, students must attend for at least 300 minutes per day. Board policy references sending a student to an alternative program as a resource and supportive service if the student misses more than 5% school. However, the Board Policy does not state how the alternative program will support the attendance issue or how the student could meet the compulsory attendance requirements in a different manner.

Since the board policy references sending students to an alternative school but does not clearly state how students can have a flexible schedule or the times that an alternative program needs to operate, a student is subject to the traditional time schedule in the alternative program, which is 300 minutes of instructional time a day for 180 days per year.

Therefore, at the special education alternative program, students are required to attend for 6 ½ hours. The student attendance rate is at about 70-75%, which means students are missing a great deal of their day. According to the National Forum on Educational Statistics, poor attendance has serious implications. Dropping out of high school is often implicit of a history of negative behaviors throughout childhood, including high rates of absenteeism. Differences in absentee rates were observed as early as kindergarten, and students who eventually dropped out of high school missed significantly more days of school in first grade than their peers who graduated from high school. In eighth grade, this pattern was even more apparent, and by ninth grade, attendance was shown to have a significant correlation with high school graduation (2009).



Students who have attendance issues also have other negative effects of missing classes such as not feeling successful, not meeting set attendance, credit and behavioral criteria, which became evident during my research that was conducted through a program evaluation and a leadership change project. I found that most students in the special education alternative programs either could not meet the criteria to transition back to the high school or did not want to go back to the high school (Gruhn, 2015). In addition, when asked if they felt successful, the students could not identify with the term “success” and felt that they often made mistakes. I believe this stemmed from not being able to meet one of the set criteria for the program, which was attending at least 90% of the time, since most students were attending only 70% (Gruhn, 2015). Due to the lack of flexibility in the attendance criteria, students were not able to transition back to the high school.

According to the U.S Department of Education, Chronic absenteeism is widespread; about one out of every seven students missed three weeks or more of school in 2013-2014. That translates to approximately 98 million school days lost. Research suggest the reasons for chronic absenteeism are as varied as the challenges our students and families face, including poor health, limited transportation, and a lack of safety—which can be particularly acute in disadvantaged communities and areas of poverty (InformEd & Center for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014).

## Recommended Policy

I am recommending a separate attendance board policy for alternative programs. The board policy would describe the Illinois Compulsory Attendance Code of requiring a student to attend at least 300 minutes a day of instructional minutes for 180 days per year (105 ILCS 5/26-1). In addition to outlining the traditional minutes of a school day and number of days in a year, I will have the board policy highlight the option for alternative schools that states the following: 180 minutes of instruction per day are required, with an additional 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of supplementary services, including without limitation work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning that are equal to the required attendance of 300 minutes per day (GSA, FAQ).

I will also have another section in the policy that gives the district authority to submit a proposal to the Board and then to ISBE if the required number of attendance days and hours do not meet the needs of a program or individual students,.

The board policy will include methods for documenting services to students should the district determine 180 minutes are provided in instruction and the other 120 are provided in supplemental services, as well as if the district determines that they are submitting a different plan to meet the needs of an individual student or program. In addition, the board policy will continue to define excused and unexcused absences, which will be consistent with the current board policy.

## Envisioned Effect of the Policy

An additional attendance policy for alternative programs will provide flexibility in scheduling to meet the individual needs of students. Students are typically sent to an

alternative program because of problems with attendance. The current board policy states that if a student is a chronic truant, an alternative program is an option, yet there is no specific policy that gives the district authority to deviate from the traditional schedule of 300 minutes a day for 180 minutes per year.

By providing a policy that allows for 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental instruction, or for the district to submit a plan to ISBE for approval, the alternative programs can customize services for students based on their needs. For instance, if a student needs to work to support his or her family, the alternative school can provide 180 minutes of instruction, allow that student to go to work, and incorporate the skills the student is gaining at work into instruction. Let's say the student works in retail. The alternative program can have the student do a project on customer service or developing a budget in order to fulfill the 120 minute of instruction.

Alternative programs also need to develop the skills students need to be college and career ready—skills that help them feel successful. According to Robert Blum, students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to school. School connection is the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. The critical requirements for feeling connected include students experiencing: 1. High academic expectations and rigor coupled with support for learning. 2. Positive adult/student relationships. 3. Physical and emotional safety. (Educational Leadership, 2005)

Students who are sent to an alternative school to work on attendance issues often have underlying problems or reasons that they can't come to school. With more flexible

schedules and therefore more individualized learning, students , have a greater likelihood of connecting to the school and wanting to attend.

The flexibility in scheduling will also increase the funding for the district. Currently, with the attendance rate at only 75%, the district is losing money when students do not attend. If the students are attending and we are able to report 180 minutes per day of instruction and 120 minutes per day of supplemental services, the district will be able to report a full day of attendance rather than a half day or lose a day for no attendance at all.

The change in the policy is necessary in order for alternative programs to meet individual student needs. Students need to feel successful, be prepared for college, a career, and most of all, students who are in an alternative program need flexibility and differentiation—that are often why they are there in the first place.

## SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

In order for students to be prepared for college and a career, they need to be in attendance; however, they need flexibility in their schedule as they often have difficulty meeting the attendance requirements due to various circumstances in their lives. In this section, I will be analyzing the necessity for a modified board policy for students in alternative programs and the educational, economic, social, political, moral and ethical needs as well as any implications associated with implementing this policy.

### Educational Analysis

The board policy is necessary to support the educational needs of students in alternative programs and to prepare students to be college and career ready. By having a flexible attendance policy students will be able to receive the necessary skills to prepare them for post-secondary success. According to a recent publication, supported by the American Youth Policy Forum, in order for students to be college and career ready, they need a foundation for learning and growth. This foundation consists of knowledge, skills, and abilities such as academic content; academic success behaviors; technical, problem-solving, teamwork, and goal-setting skills; and college and career knowledge (Hooker and Brand p. xi). Each area can be developed using a flexible schedule of 180 minutes of instruction per day with an additional 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of supplementary services. The Illinois State Board of Education, (ISBE) allows this flexible scheduling to fulfill the compulsory attendance laws if the following components of supplementary instruction are included without limitation: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning (105 ILCS 5/26-1).

Therefore, ensuring students are prepared with the necessary skills to be college and career ready would allow the students to meet the attendance requirements of Illinois. Students in alternative programs are often sent to a program because they have failing grades or they are not successful in their current environment. According to Hooker and Brand, academic success behaviors are study skills and other effective learning habits, such as self-monitoring and discipline (Hooker & Brand p. 6). In the alternative programs students are taught how to self-monitor their learning and study skills and are often given individualized learning plans. The students will work with staff to determine how they best learn in order to meet their goals to determine academic success. Academic success is the ability to understand one's own thinking and level of understanding (Hooker and Brand, p. 6). For example, going to a college and having to apply for college is much different than talking about it in school. In addition, it is important for students to shadow adults in their careers and have opportunities to experience various careers in order to make informed decisions. The publication, *Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond* states that in order for students to make informed decisions about college and/or careers that lead to long-term prosperity, they need rigorous academics, college and career planning, supports to meet their needs, and opportunities to develop employer-desired skills and personal resources (Hooker and Brand p. 4).

According to the Individual's with Disabilities with Education Act (IDEA), special education students must receive a transition plan that focuses on post-secondary outcomes a transition plan is:

- A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability designed to be

within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability. These activities facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

- Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]

In the alternative programs serving special education students, it is necessary to ensure students are college and career ready, as law requires it. A regular attendance schedule cannot meet the needs, as it requires community experiences, employment and other daily living skills. In addition to these requirements, student in the district's alternative program are not transitioning back to the high school. In fact, from 2011 to 2014, only six students went back to the regular high school program (Gruhn 2015). Therefore, it is essential that the Board adopt a modified policy to address the educational needs of students attending alternative schools.

According to the proposed board policy, students will receive a minimum of 180 minutes of academic instruction a day. Students still need to learn the core academics and it will be essential to ensure that teachers understand that the programming still needs to

be individualized. Students will need to be assessed and it will be essential to ensure students have the opportunity to be prepared for college and career readiness.

### Economic Analysis

In Illinois, it is necessary for students to attend school in order for districts to receive average daily attendance funding. According to the Frequently Asked Questions Guide from the Illinois State Board of Education, general state aid (GSA) is the largest state funding source for school districts (Dec. 2015). In the district, the overall funding for general state aid is \$75,834,649.39 per year (G. Polk, chief financial officer). Therefore, the district relies heavily on students attending school in order to receive funding.

In the district's alternative school students are not attending on a regular basis. In a recent study based in our district, over a three-year time students were only attending an average of 75% percent of the time (Gruhn 2016). Most recently attendance has dropped to around 70% (WPS O'PLUS District Report, p. 7). Therefore, if students are not physically in school for the full day(300 minutes), or at least half of a day, the district cannot collect the average daily attendance funding. According to school code, students need at least 300 minutes per day of instructional minutes for 180 days per year (105 ILCS 5/26-1).

According to the district's chief financial advisor, it is difficult to determine the actual amount that this would cost per student per missed. The average dollar amount brought in by special education students for general state aid per year is \$11,054,613.61, and the amount per student is \$5,141.68. That amount is reduced each day a student is absence from school. Therefore, it is necessary to have more flexibility to count attendance for various school-related college and career training that will account for the



180 minutes of academic instruction per day and 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of supplementary services, including work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, and conflict resolution or service learning.

A procedure will need to be developed to ensure that student activities are tracked for attendance purposes so that the district does not lose any funding.

### Political Analysis

A modified policy alternative school attendance policy is needed to meet the political needs, as a board policy is required to ensure that the procedures of a school district are followed. The Illinois State Board of Education requires all students attend school, which is considered the compulsory attendance law. According to Illinois Association of School Boards, the main purpose of a board policy is to ensure legal compliance, direct or authorize the superintendent or staff members, establish board processes, and/or provide information (Selbee & Lovern July/Aug. 2015).

In this case of the modified attendance policy would serve all four areas: legal compliance, directing/authorizing, establishing processes, and providing information.

### *Compliance*

In the area of compliance there is a state law that mandates that we have a compulsory attendance law; therefore, it is imperative the district have a board policy to address this requirement. According to Jim Strickland, when we make school attendance compulsory, then we have a legal mandate to define exactly what constitutes a “school.” This obligation to officially define “schooling” creates a restrictive box that limits innovation and eventually becomes self-defeating for individuals and for our democracy. Compulsory attendance laws inhibit the widespread development of

alternative pathways to learning, while the lack of alternative pathways keeps us afraid to let go of compulsory school attendance (Strickland, 2014). Board policies typically applied to the general education setting are applied to alternative schools as well in order to ensure students are attending, and also in order to define “school” and be in compliance with the law. However, for students attending alternative schools, the board policy can and should reflect ISBE rules and regulation to allow school districts to have a flexible schedule that accounts for 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental instruction focused on areas that include: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life-skills, and conflict resolution or service learning. In the district’s current board policy this does not exist; it only includes 300 minutes of instruction each day and addresses the standard compulsory attendance laws. Therefore, it is important to include 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental instruction and in order to prepare students for college and career readiness. The policy needs to reflect this change to allow for alternative pathways to instruction and flexibility in scheduling to increase attendance for students.

*Direct/Authorize Superintendent Staff Members*

The modified board policy will also provide direction to the superintendent and staff. The Superintendent will be authorized to submit the general state aid for students who are receiving a flexible schedule and oversee programming for students in a more flexible manner. The policy will direct staff to provide more service learning and community-based instruction, as well as other opportunities to engage students in their own learning and increase attendance.

### *Establish Processes*

In addition to directing staff, the modified board policy will help with establishing new processes for the alternative programs. Allowing students more flexible schedules means the programming will need to be revised to ensure that the students are receiving at least 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental instruction.

Processes to document the time will need to be established, schedules will need to be developed and it will be important to look at the needs of each individual student to ensure they are college and career ready by the time they leave school. The processes to provide the supplemental instruction will need to be established and ways to collect assessment data will also be part of establishing the process based on the modified policy.

### *Providing Information*

Communication to all stakeholders is one of the most important aspects of adopting a new board policy. The board policy will include the purpose of providing the flexible schedule for students in alternative schools, which is to meet the student's individual educational needs and to prepare the students for post-secondary success. In addition, the policy will also communicate the law for attendance, the expectations, procedures, and criteria to transition to the regular high school. In addition, legal references and cross-references should be included at the end. (Selbee & Lovern July/Aug. 2015).

When a new board policy is adopted, the school district's board of education has to vote on the policy. The school board should ask the following questions:

- Is this still relevant?
- Is it still legally compliant?

- Does it reflect district practice?
- Does it give adequate direction to the superintendent?
- Are we getting the results we expected when we put the policy in place? (Selbee & Lovern July/Aug. 2015).

If the Board of Education has questions or concerns regarding the policy, those questions will need to be addressed in order to ensure the modified policy is passed.

### Social Analysis

The modified board policy is necessary to address the social and emotional needs of students in the alternative programs. By providing students the opportunity to have a flexible schedule, they will be able to participate in 120 minutes of supplemental instruction focused on areas that include: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, and conflict resolution or service learning. This time is essential to provide opportunities for service learning, which will benefit the students. According to the *Strategy Brief*, service learning creates stronger bonds with adults, greater empathy and awareness of cultural differences, newfound desires to be politically active, and an increase in school attendance (Palmon, Cathcart, Lembeck, & Peterson, January 2015).

According to a recent study conducted for the purpose of completing a dissertation, students attending the alternative were asked to reflect on the statement “I feel successful.” The students who were in the group interview expressed that they wanted to be successful but they were conflicted because they didn’t know if they were successful. One student stated that he messed up but is doing better, and another student discussed issues at home (Gruhn 2016). These statements regarding success show the

social emotional needs of the students. Having a flexible schedule each day will allow for 120 minutes of counseling, creating social bonds with adults and making outside connections with community agencies.

There can be 120 minutes per day focused on the social needs of the students. This requires skilled staff members who understand how to provide the necessary resources to support and build relationships. In addition, there has to be a balance for the students receiving these supports to ensure they are being prepared for life outside of school.

### Moral and Ethical Analysis

The moral and ethical needs of having an attendance policy for students attending an alternative program are based on a professional standard of the expectations we have for our students. First and foremost, it is important to understand the difference between morals and ethics. According to the Changing Minds website, morals have a greater social element and tend to have a very broad acceptance. Morals are far more about good and bad than other values. Ethics, on the other hand, tend to be codified into a formal system or a set of rules which are explicitly adopted by a group of people. Ethics are thus internally defined and adopted, whilst morals tend to be externally imposed on other people (Changing Mind, Retrieved June 2016).

Therefore, when we think of an attendance policy and preparing students for college and career readiness, students need to learn how to attend school, as attendance in the work place is one of the most important work ethics. According to Gail Sessoms, employees who show up for work on time more often than not and give proper notice of absences or tardiness are practicing good attendance. Attendance as a work ethic includes

sticking to work schedules, being ready to start work on time, remaining on the job during the workday to complete duties, and limited use of leave (Sessoms, <http://work.chron.com/importance-attendance-work-ethics-5082.html>, Retrieved June 16, 2016).

The modified attendance policy would allow students to have jobs and other responsibilities, whereas teachers could use the 120 minutes per day to teach this important work ethic. This is an ethical standard that employees need in the work place. If the importance of attendance is not taught to our students, they will be set up to fail in the real world.

If we do not teach the ethical skills of attending and being present while in school, the workplace will be negatively impacted. According to Sessoms, when there is chronic absenteeism or lateness in the workplace, others have more work, schedules are disrupted, there is a cost to the employer, it affects other team members' ability to accomplish their goals, and there is poor collaboration and teamwork (Sessoms, 2016).

### SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Board policies are often rigid and are focused on the general student population. However, it is important to consider groups of students who are in specialized programs, such as an alternative program. In this section, I will discuss the goals and objectives of the policy and why this policy is needed in school districts based on the values of the goals and objectives.

#### *Goals and Objectives*

The three goals of this revised board policy are: 1. To include a section on attendance for students who go to alternative schools; 2. To give students attending alternative programs the flexibility to attend 180 minutes of core academics and 120 minutes of supplemental programming; 3. To give the district the flexibility to submit an individualized plan to meet the individualized needs of a student if it is required.

#### *Alternative Schools Addressed in Board Policy*

The first goal is to revise the board policy to include a section for students who attend alternative schools. The objective is to give students in specialized programs more flexibility regarding attendance requirements. In addition, this section acknowledges that students who are attending alternative schools often have attendance issues and need specialized programming and considerations. By creating a section which acknowledges students in specialized programs such as alternative programs, students will have the opportunity to take advantage of the flexible attendance policy and the district will also be able to collect the general state aid funding.

#### *Flexible Schedule*

The second goal is to give students the option to attend for 180 minutes a day for

core academics, and then get the additional 120 minutes a day in supplemental services. The objective of this goal is to ensure students are still getting the general academics and touching base with their teachers for at least half of the day. However, for the rest of the day, the students may be getting credit for working, going to the health club for physical education, doing service hours in the community or learning other necessary skills. The flexible schedule helps the students prepare for life outside of high school, ensures they are still earning credits, and getting attendance hours. In addition, the district is able to count the student as a full day of attendance in order to get general state aid funding.

#### *Individualized Plan*

The third goal is to revise the board policy to allow the district to submit an individualized plan to the state if it is required. The objective of this is to ensure that all students can get credit for attending, even if the student has limitations or restrictions and is not able to attend for 180 minutes a day and for an additional 120 minutes of supplemental services. This would be utilized in limited cases, but a student may need this support and the Illinois State Board of Education allows school districts to submit plans for students in alternative programs.

#### Needs, Values, and Preferences

The district had a board policy about compulsory attendance that reflected Illinois School Code, but it did not address an attendance policy for students in alternative settings that needed intensive interventions, which is allowable under the school code. The current board policy states that if a student is chronically truant, an alternative program is an option, yet there is no specific board policy that gives the district authority to deviate from the traditional schedule of 300 minutes per day for 180 days per year.



Students in alternative programs already have attendance issues, which is one of the main reasons for referrals to alternative programs. In addition, students typically only attend 70-75% of the time (Gruhn, 2015) making it difficult to capture the full funding for general state aid. The need for this revised policy is for the purpose of both the district and for the students. By revising the board policy, the district is able to capture funding for general state aid that may have been lost if the student was not attending a full or half day, but they are able to attend for 180 minutes and gain supplemental skills for the other 120 minutes per day.

By allowing the student flexibility in his schedule and attending for 180 minutes per day of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental instruction the student is also benefiting. The alternative program can develop a program specifically designed to ensure that the 120 minutes per day of supplemental services is preparing the student for college and career readiness. The 120 minutes can be used for skills such as: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution, and service learning. The change in the policy is necessary in order for alternative programs to be more creative in the way they are servicing students and to meet individual needs. Students need to feel successful, be prepared for college and careers and most of all, students who are in an alternative program need flexibility and differentiation, which must be addressed in a new attendance policy.

## SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Changing a policy requires careful planning and analyzing both the positive and negative implications. I will be representing the pros and cons of changing the board attendance policy to reflect the three goals of acknowledging specialized programs, adding a provision for the 180 minutes of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental services and allowing a provision for an individualized attendance plan. I will be representing this information through research findings and professional opinions.

### Argument

By having a flexible school day schedule, alternative high school programs can not only focus on attendance, but also develop the skills students need to be college and career ready, which will also help students feel successful. The flexibility in scheduling will also increase the funding for school districts because a full day of instruction can be reported based on the fact that the student is receiving 180 minutes per day of instruction and 120 minutes of supplemental services, rather than just reporting a half day of attendance or losing a day for no attendance at all. In addition, the ability for schools to individualize a plan for a student will allow a student to succeed and will allow a district to collect GSA funds whether the student is able to attend for an hour, half day, or for a full day.

According to the GSA FAQ, alternative schools may record attendance in the following manner: 180 minutes of instruction per day are required, with an additional 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of supplementary services, including without limitation work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning that are equal to

the required attendance of 300 minutes per day (GSA, FAQ).

Therefore, alternative schools still require 300 minutes of instruction per day; however, the way the instruction is delivered can be flexible compared to a traditional school. In addition, if 300 minutes per day of instruction does not meet the needs of the students, a district can submit a plan for approval to the Illinois State Board for approval (105 ILCS 5/13B-45, 13B-50).

This flexibility in scheduling is beneficial to the student, district, and to the alternative program. According to a recent publication supported by the American Youth Policy Forum, in order for students to be college and career ready, they need a foundation for learning and growth that consists of knowledge, skills, and abilities, such as academic content; academic success behaviors; technical, problem-solving, teamwork, and goal-setting skills; and college and career knowledge (Hooker and Brand p. xi). Each area can be developed using a flexible schedule of 180 minutes of instruction per day with an additional 120 minutes of instruction in the areas of supplementary services. These skills are essential for every student and have been a focus of the Common Core State Standards. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, the standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, in their career, and in life, regardless of where they live ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)).

The district benefits because the Illinois State Board of Education, (ISBE) allows this flexible scheduling to fulfill the compulsory attendance laws if the following components are included without limitation: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict

resolution or service learning (105 ILCS 5/26-1). By fulfilling this requirement, the district is able to collect general state aid funding for the full day verses a half day or not at all. Currently, the attendance in the alternative programs is only at 70-75% according to a recent study (Gruhn, 2016). It is difficult to determine the amount that this would cost the state; however, the average amount per year brought in by special education students for general state aid is \$11,054,613.61, and the amount per student is \$5,141.68. That amount is reduced each day a student is absent from school. Therefore, if students attend more and the district could count supplemental services in the formula, then that \$11 million-dollar figure would only grow each year. General state aid funding is used to support education funding, and attendance is one of the ways the state determines this formula. According to Bruce Baker, one major problem with average daily attendance (ADA) is that districts must plan their budgets and staffing on an annual basis, and mid-year adjustments based on attendance counts result in reductions in aid that are difficult to absorb (2012).

Students in the district's program are not only in an alternative program, but also have special education needs. According to the Individual's with Disabilities with Education Act (IDEA), students must receive a transition plan that focuses on post-secondary outcomes. A transition plan includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]. A student can benefit from the flexible scheduling in order to meet his or her transition goals. In addition, the district is complying with federal regulations in regards to meeting the needs of students with

disabilities, as well as working toward college and care readiness, which is an area of focus of the Common Core State Standards. All students, whether they are in special education or in general education, should have an individualized plan to set goals and objectives for life after high school. Most alternative programs have individualized learning plans in addition to individualized education plans which can utilize the flexible scheduling to achieve the goals.

Flexible schedule allows the alternative program to focus on the student needs and to differentiate the programming. Flexible scheduling gives staff the opportunity to provide service learning projects, the necessary social and emotional support as well as the supplemental supports and academics. According to my recent research, some of the areas in which students need the most support are social and emotional support, understanding what it means to be successful, and monitoring their own progress. (Gruhn, 2016). Alternative programs need to be resourceful in working with students with attendance and other issues which make it difficult for them to succeed. By having the option to utilize flexible scheduling, the alternative programs can tailor the academics and supplemental supports to the individual student to ensure successful outcomes.

#### Counter-Argument

Although revising an attendance board policy provides more flexibility to students, staff, and the district, it does not mean that the overall attendance will increase or that outcomes will change for students. A current research study shows that students in alternative programs rarely transition back to high school programs and that students typically only attend 70-75% of the time (Gruhn 2015).

According to Illinois Association of School Boards, the main purpose of a board policy is to ensure legal compliance, direct or authorize the superintendent or staff members, establish board processes, and/or provide information (Selbee & Lovern, 2015). Revising a board policy does not ensure that a student will comply with the compulsory attendance laws, whether the student has to attend school for 300 minutes per day or 180 minutes per day with an additional 120 minutes of supplemental services.

If a school district utilizes flexible scheduling, it is necessary to provide 120 minutes of supplemental services, which can be used for counseling or to meet the social emotional needs of the students. This requires skilled staff members who understand how to provide the necessary supports. In addition, there has to be a balance for the students receiving these supports to ensure there is an educational focus and preparing students for life outside of school.

One area that Students need to understand is the importance of being present and attending. If we do not teach the ethical skills of attending and being present, the workplace will be negatively impacted when our students leave high school enter it. According to Sessoms, when there is chronic absenteeism or lateness in the workplace, it is negatively affected, as others have more work, schedules are disrupted, there is a cost to the employer as they might have to hire temporary workers to fill in the gaps, it affects other team members' ability to accomplish their goals, and there is poor collaboration and teamwork. (Sessoms, 2016).

In conclusion, in order to revise the policy, the board of education in a school district has to vote, which should be determined by the relevance, compliance, practice, results, and the direction it provides to the superintendent (Selbee & Lovern July/Aug.

2015). If the board of education has questions or concerns regarding the policy, those questions will need to be addressed to pass the revised policy. The pros and the cons of the modified policy should be considered to determine whether or not it is adopted.

## SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### Introduction

In this section I will discuss the policy implementation plan. The plan will include needed educational activities for the board of education, staff, parents and students. In the second part of this section, I will include professional development activities to implement the new Board policy, the flexible schedule, and to record keep. In the next part of the implementation plan, time schedules for implementation will be addressed; this will include the education activities, professional development, and overall roll out of the plan. In the fourth section of the implementation plan, the budget detail will be developed and analyzed. Lastly, activities to monitor the progress of the plan will be addressed.

### Introducing the Policy

To begin, the policy needs to be introduced to the board, staff, parents, and the community. Considering a new policy requires professional development activities so they can understand the implications of the revised policy.

#### *Present the Policy to Board of Education*

It is important that the board receive a copy of the revised attendance policy, which will include a detailed section on students attending alternative programs. The board will receive a PowerPoint presentation on the changes to the policy, which will include: a section specifically for students attending alternative programming, flexible scheduling for 180 minutes of core subjects and 120 minutes of supplemental activities, and an explanation of how average daily attendance is currently counted verses the changes. In addition, the revised policy will include a section that allows the district to



submit an individualized plan to ISBE if a student needs special scheduling accommodations. The board will have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions regarding the revised policy. This presentation will take place before any board action is required.

*Present the Policy to Staff*

Staff will receive an overview regarding the change in the attendance policy using a PowerPoint presentation similar to the board presentation. However, the staff will need more in-depth information as to how the policy will affect their classroom, the expectations, how attendance will be recorded and monitored, and how the schedule will be developed to support the requirements of the state.

*Present the Policy to Parents and Community*

Parents and community members will receive a presentation, which will provide an overview of the new policy. They will also receive information on expectations for attendance, which will include the requirement to attend school for 180 minutes per day and complete 120 minutes of supplementary activities; any special requirements of the parent such as special transportation and signing off on documentation; and on student requirements. Parents and their child will need to understand the benefits of the revised attendance policy. In addition, they will also need to be educated on the requirements of supplementary activities and the consequences if they are not completed, which would result in the student being counted as absent for a partial or a full day and possibly not earning necessary credit or grades towards assignments.

*Present the Policy to Students*

The students will receive a “student version” PowerPoint presentation that provides an overview of the revised board attendance policy. This will highlight the changes for the student. The students will need to understand their role in completing 180 minutes of core studies and 120 minutes of supplementary activities in order to be considered in attendance for a full day. Students will need education regarding their expectations for attendance and know that although they have more flexibility to attend in a variety of ways, the expectation is to complete the day with 180 minutes of core and 120 minutes of supplementary activities. Students will be given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this information.

**Professional Development Activities and Timeline**

Professional development activities will include an overview of the board policy that details the regulations, expectations, and how to use flexible scheduling to prepare students to be college and career ready.

The following table describes the topic, provider, audience and target date for the professional development activities scheduled for the year.

Table 1: Professional Development Activities and Timelines

| <b>Activities</b>  | <b>Provider</b>                  | <b>Audience</b>                    | <b>Target Date</b>                    |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Policy Overview  | Director of Alternative Programs | Board, staff parents and students  | Summer 2017                           |
| Rules and Regulations Regarding Compulsory Attendance Laws in Illinois | District Attorney                | Board, staff, parents and students | Summer 2017                           |
| Teaching Expectations:   | Director of Alternative          | Staff                              | Fall 2017: Aug. Sept. Oct. Nov. & Dec |

|  |   |                               |  |
|--|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Implementing the Core Curriculum and Individualizing to Provide Supplementary Activities                       | Programs  |                               | (This training will need follow up to ensure teachers understand the model)                  |
| Attendance and Record Keeping  | Director of Student Support                         | Staff                         | Fall 2017  |
| Student Assessment: How Do We Know the Student Is Successful?  | Director of Assessment                              | Staff                         | Fall 2017, Winter 2018 and Spring 2018 (This will follow the assessment benchmark schedules) |
| How Do I Make This New Attendance Policy Work for Me? Earning Credits and Being Present for a Full Day         | Teacher, student & Director of Alternative Programs | Students                      | Fall 2017  |
| What Activities Can I Do to Get Credit for the 120 Minutes a Day?  | Teacher, student & Director of Alternative Schools  | Students                      | Fall 2017  |
| Transition from High School to College   | Former Student                                      | Student                       | Winter 2018  |
| Checking in: How is the Flexible Schedule Working?   | Director of Alternative Programs                    | Students and Staff            | Winter 2018, Spring 2018   |
| My Child Is on a Flexible Attendance Schedule, What are the Requirements? Expectations? Assessment Procedures? | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher           | Parents                       | Fall 2017  |
| Open Questions and Answer Sessions   | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher           | Board, Staff Parents, Student | Fall 2017, Winter 2018, Spring 2018  |

As you can see from the table above, adopting a new or revised board policy requires a great deal of professional development for all stakeholders. Professional development activities include an overview of the new attendance policy to more specific components such as the teaching expectations and classroom requirements. In addition, professional development for this policy begins in the summer prior to the school year and continues throughout the year. It is important to note that professional development should be continuous and is an opportunity to not only teach about the revised policy, but to learn what is working, what needs improvements, and to allow stakeholders to have continuous conversations. According to a report by Center for Public Education, “Professional development can no longer just be about exposing teachers to a concept in a one-time workshop, or giving teachers basic knowledge about a teaching methodology. Instead, professional development in an era of accountability requires a fundamental change in a teacher’s practice that leads to increases in student learning in the classroom” (Allison Gulamhussein, September, 2013).

In addition, professional development will help the students and staff implement the new attendance policy to include the 120 minutes of supplemental activities. These activities can be on or off campus and can include work, counseling, or other activities that students need in order to prepare them for life after high school. It is important that staff, parents, and students understand how to use those minutes to meet individual, academic, and social emotional needs.

### Time Schedule

In this section, an outline of the specific time schedules for adopting and implementing the new revised board policy to address attendance for students in

alternative schools is described in Table 2.

Table 2: Schedule for Adopting and Implementing Revised Board Attendance Policy

| <b>Benchmark Task To Be Completed:</b>   | <b>Person Responsible</b>                 | <b>Target Date</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| Draft Sample Policy  | Director of Alternative Programs          | Winter 2017  |
| Submit Policy to Attorney for Review   | Director of Alternative Programs          | Spring 2017  |
| Revise Policy Based on Attorney Recommendations  | Director of Alternative Programs          | Spring 2017  |
| Submit Final Draft Policy to Attorney  | Director of Alternative Programs          | Spring 2017  |
| Professional Development on: Policy Overview   | Director of Alternative Programs          | Summer 2017  |
| Professional Development on: Rules and Regulations Regarding Compulsory Attendance Laws in Illinois  | District Attorney                         | Summer 2017  |
| Submit Policy for Action to Be Approved by Board   | Director of Alternative Programs          | Fall 2017  |
| Professional Development on: Teaching Expectations: Implementing the Core Curriculum and Individualizing to Provide Supplementary Activities | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher | Fall 2017: Aug. Sept. Oct. Nov. & Dec<br>(This training will need follow up to ensure teachers understand the model) |
| Professional Development on: Attendance and Record Keeping   | Director of Student Support               | Fall 2017  |
| Benchmark Assessments  | Director of Assessment                    | Fall 2017<br>Winter 2018<br>and Spring 2018  |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Professional Development on: Student Assessment: How Do We Know the Student Is Successful   | Director of Assessment                                 | Fall 2017<br>Winter 2018<br>and Spring 2018 (This will follow the assessment benchmark schedules) |
| Professional Development on: How Do I Make This New Attendance Policy Work for Me? Earning Credits and Being Present for a Full Day         | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher, Student     | Fall 2017   |
| Professional Development on: What Activities Can I Do to Get Credit for the 120 Minutes a Day?  | Teacher, Student, and Director of Alternative Programs | Fall 2017   |
| Professional Development on: Transition from High School to College   | Former Student   | Winter 2018   |
| Professional Development on: Checking in: How is the Flexible Schedule Working?   | Students and Staff                                     | Winter 2017,<br>Spring 2017   |
| Professional Development on: My Child Is on a Flexible Attendance Schedule, What are the Requirements? Expectations? Assessment Procedures? | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher              | Fall 2016   |
| Professional Development on: Open Questions and Answer Sessions   | Director of Alternative Programs, Teacher              | Fall 2017,<br>Winter 2018,<br>Spring 2018   |

The time schedule above indicates that a great deal of professional development as well as detailed steps are required to implement a new or revised policy that affects specialized programs such as alternative education. A board policy such as this requires a detailed plan for professional development, assessment, and how the policy will be reviewed or revised in order for it to be adopted. Full implementation will take a year.

#### Program Budgets

In this section I will demonstrate that adopting the revised board policy is fiscally

responsible and the projected costs to implement are low compared to the benefits to the students and district. In the following table the costs are outlined:

Table 3: Costs of Implementing Revised Policy

| Activity  | Total Costs  |
|---|--|
| Attorney Costs to Review Changes to Board Policy                            | Approximately \$200 per hour, 8 hours maximum = \$1000   |
| Professional Development Costs-Subs for Teachers                            | \$100 per day, 12 days for 5 staff members max, (some staff members do not need subs), =\$6000 |
| Equipment for Students to Record Supplementary Activities (30 chrome Books) | \$250 per chrome book = \$7500   |
|   | Total: \$14,500  |

The above table represents the maximum costs to implement the revised board attendance policy for students attending alternative programs. The current general state aid for special education students per year is \$11,054,613.61 and the amount per student is \$5,141.68.

Currently, students are only attending 75% of the time in the alternative program. The General State Aid is based on attendance and aid will increase if students are in attendance more often and the district has more flexibility to count supplementary activities. Although initially revising the board policy will cost around \$14,500, it will benefit the students because they will be in school earning credits. The revised policy will also benefit the district because the GSA will increase and teachers will be able to individualize instruction based on the needs of students.

According to ChangeLab Solutions, funding schools based on student attendance hurts poor school districts more than wealthy school districts for the following reasons:

- Poor schools are made poorer. These schools are ill-equipped to serve their students, particularly those struggling with poverty and health issues.

- Schools can't intervene to actually improve attendance rates because they lack necessary resources.
- Many student absences are simply beyond the control of local public school officials. This is especially true for children from low-income families.
- There is little evidence that these policy strategies effectively incentivize school districts to address nonattendance.

In addition, ChangeLab Solutions states that attendance-based school financing not only exacerbates existing financial disparities among schools, but also hurts the low-income, chronically ill children who attend the poor schools (Kappagoda, 2015).

#### Progress Monitoring Activities

Progress monitoring will focus on attendance records, supplementary activities and academic achievement ,and will be monitored by the Director of Alternative Programs, the teaching staff, and the students.

#### *Attendance*

First and foremost, attendance records of the students will be reviewed on a quarterly basis to determine if attendance is increasing. Overall attendance rate for the program will be calculated on a quarterly basis. Therefore, the data will be collected per student and as an entire attendance site. Attendance should increase per student and for the entire site. Staff at the alternative school will be responsible for monitoring student attendance to determine if individual students are meeting the requirements. The Director of Alternative Programs will be monitoring the overall attendance data.

#### *Supplementary Activities*

Secondly, student time spent on core activities and supplementary activities will



be audited on a quarterly basis to ensure the district is meeting the compulsory attendance requirements and to ensure that teachers and students are accurately recording the necessary minutes. Core activities will make up 180 minutes per day and will focus on subject areas such as math, reading, social studies and science. Supplementary activities will make up 120 minutes per day and can focus on the following activities: work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning. Students will monitor their own supplementary activities and will turn in a log to the teaching staff on a weekly basis. The director will audit these activities on a quarterly basis.

#### *Academic Achievement*

Lastly, student achievement data will be analyzed for each benchmark period for fall, winter, and spring. Student achievement should increase if students are in attendance and present. Academic achievement will be monitored by the staff for each student to look at growth on an individual basis. Growth will also be analyzed based from baseline data to the average benchmark data for the entire alternative program, which will be monitored by staff and the Director of Alternative Programs

## SECTION SIX: ASSESSMENT PLAN

### Introduction

Implementation monitoring and outcome measures will focus on attendance, supplementary activities to achieve academic credits as well as attendance, and academic achievement. The following table reflects the assessment and monitoring activities.

Table 4: Assessment Plan to Monitor Effectiveness of Board Policy:

| <b>Data Review</b>  | <b>Person Responsible</b>                      | <b>Target Date</b>                                     |
|---|--|--|
| Daily Attendance Recording<br>(180 minutes core instruction,<br>120 minutes supplementary<br>instruction)   | Teacher and Student                            | Daily  |
| Grade, reit and goal review   | Teacher  | Weekly   |
| Quarterly Attendance Data   | Director of Alternative<br>Programs            | October 2017<br>January 2018<br>March 2018<br>May 2018 |
| Academic data review<br>Grades and credit earned<br>Benchmark data (NWEA<br>MAP)<br>Progress Monitoring<br>Review of documented<br>instructional and<br>supplemental minutes. | Director of Alternative<br>Programs<br>Teacher | Fall 2017<br>Winter 2018<br>Spring 2018                |
| End of the year survey for<br>students and staff members  | Director of Alternative<br>Programs            | May 2018   |

## Implementation Monitoring

### *Students*

In order to determine if students are in school for 180 minutes per day for core academics and completing 120 minutes per day of supplementary activities, students will be responsible for coming to school for 180 minutes per day and checking in with their teacher. This must be recorded as a standard attendance day. The students will be responsible for logging their supplementary activities using their Chromebooks when they are outside of school. This will allow the teacher “real time” access to the log and also allow for the teacher to record the other part of the attendance day.

### *Teacher*

The teacher will have responsibility for ensuring that the attendance is recorded daily for the 180 minutes of core academics and 120 minutes of supplemental activities, and that the supplemental activities are meeting the necessary requirements for the student to become college and career ready. In addition, the teacher will have to monitor attendance for 180 minutes per day. The student and teacher must work collaboratively to determine the necessary activities that the student needs to complete his/her program to earn attendance hours and to work towards necessary credits.

Teachers will also monitor grades and credits earned on a weekly basis to determine if the student is progressing and growing. Individual goals will be assessed to ensure that the student is being prepared for college and career readiness. The teacher will have a goal conference with the students.

## Outcomes Monitoring

In order to measure the effectiveness of the program, the teacher and Director of Alternative Programs will review the overall percentage of student attendance. A full day of attendance will be 180 minutes of attendance in the alternative program and 120 minutes of supplementary activities per day that include: without limitation work-based learning, student assistance programs, counseling, case management, health and fitness programs, life- skills, conflict resolution or service learning that are equal to the required attendance of 300 minutes per day (GSA, FAQ).

Student grades and credit earned will be monitored on a quarterly basis by both the teacher and the Director of Alternative Programs to ensure that students are able to pass necessary courses and earn high school credit towards a diploma. In addition, data will be reviewed at key benchmarks in fall, winter, and spring. Monitoring benchmark data will determine if the students are making adequate growth in their core academic areas.

Lastly, a survey will be conducted to determine the strengths of the revised attendance policy as well as the areas that need improvement. The survey will be distributed to both students and staff members.

According to Kristin Morgan, a Curriculum Specialist from NWEA, successful educators know that all students have the potential to learn and grow and that to understand how students are learning, the educator needs to ask the following questions:

- Where is each child starting the semester or school year?
- How is each child progressing along his or her learning pathway throughout the year and toward becoming college and career ready?

- How does each child's achievement and progress compare to his or her peers in the classroom, school, district and country? ( 2014)

These questions can guide continuous assessments and progress monitoring throughout the year. The educator can celebrate growth and make adjustments to instruction when needed. The student and teacher can have continuous conversations regarding progress towards the student's individual needs, which should improve desired outcomes.

## SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

### Appropriateness of the Policy

This change to the board policy is appropriate because it addresses the needs of all stakeholders including students, teachers, and the district. It provides necessary flexibility for all involved, supports the individualized learning needs of the students, addresses the requirements of teachers to differentiate, and provides an opportunity for the district to maximize the funding based on the General State Aid formula and attendance requirement of students.

The revised board attendance policy is the most appropriate policy because it addresses the needs of all stakeholders, which includes students who attend alternative schools, staff members, and the district. Students who attend the alternative school will receive the necessary flexibility in their schedule to receive 180 minutes per day in core academics and receive an additional 120 minutes in supplemental services that can include vocational training, counseling, independent living skills, and other necessary skills. This flexible schedule will increase the student attendance rate and allow the students to earn the necessary credits to graduate based on their individual needs.

Staff will benefit from this change in policy because they can adjust a student's schedule to meet various requirements. In addition, a staff member can also have a flexible schedule. The set time would be the core academic time; however, the flexible time might be to support the student in the community on various independence skills. Therefore, the staff member can work with the student to develop agreeable times to meet. In addition, staff can have flexibility to program creatively to help students earn necessary credits.

The district will benefit from the change in policy because then they will be able to count a full day of attendance for supplementary activities, and students only have to be in school for 180 minutes a day versus 300 minutes. By counting supplementary activities toward attendance, the district will collect more money in general state aid and the overall attendance rate should increase.

This policy supports federal and state laws in regards to General State Aid, IDEA, 504 plans and is an opportunity for students to receive alternative programming. Students can optimize their learning experience with supplemental instructional activities, earn credits, receive full credit for attending, and become productive citizens. Students in special education can receive their education in the least restrictive environment and have a program tailored to their needs.

Overall, the revised board attendance policy supports the needs of all stakeholders. It is a student-centered approach to learning and gives students the opportunity to earn credits and attendance hours for activities outside of the regular school day. The district benefits from this approach because as student attendance increases the general state aid also increases.

## References

- About the Standards. (2016.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from  
<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>
- Blum, R. (2005, April). A Case for School Connectedness. *Educational Leadership*, 62, 16-20. Retrieved November 27, 2016, from  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr05/vol62/num07/A-case-for-School-Connectedness.aspx>
- Board Policy 6010. (2010, July 24). Retrieved March 25, 2016, from  
<https://intra.wps60.org/policies/policySS.php?id=375>
- Chronic Absenteeism in The Nation's Schools. (2014.). Retrieved November 27, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>
- General State Aid Frequently Asked Questions. (2015, December). Retrieved March 23, 2016, from [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/funding/pdf/gsa\\_faq.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/funding/pdf/gsa_faq.pdf)
- Gulamhussein, A. (2013, September). Teaching the Teachers: Effective Professional Development. Retrieved November 16, 2016, from  
<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teaching-the-Teachers-Effective-Professional-Development-in-an-Era-of-High-Stakes-Accountability/Teaching-the-Teachers-Full-Report.pdf>
- Gruhn, J. E. (2016.). *An alternative program to help special education students transition back into high school: A program evaluation*. (Doctoral dissertation). National Louis University.
- Gruhn, J. E. (2016). *Redefining a special education alternative program to make students college and career ready: A change plan* (doctoral dissertation).



National-Louis University.

Hooker, S., & Brand, B. (2009). Success at Every Step - American Youth Policy Forum.

Retrieved June 16, 2016, from

<http://www.aypf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/03/SuccessAtEveryStep.pdf>

IDEA - Building The Legacy of IDEA 2004. (n.d.). Retrieved June 13, 2016, from

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>.

Illinois Association of School Boards. (n.d.). Retrieved October 07, 2016, from

[https://www.iasb.com/journal/j070815\\_05.cfm](https://www.iasb.com/journal/j070815_05.cfm)

Illinois General Assembly, (105 ILCS 5/) School Code. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2016,

from <http://ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1005>

Kappagoda, M. (2015). How Student Health Affects School Funding, and Vice Versa.

Retrieved November 16, 2016, from

<http://www.communitycommons.org/2015/04/how-student-health-affects-school-funding/>

Moran, K. (2014, February). What Does Measuring Student Growth Look Like In

Practice. Retrieved November 16, 2016, from

<http://gettingsmart.com/author/guest/>

National Forum on Education Statistics. (2009). *Every School Day Counts: The Forum*

*Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data* (NFES 2009–804). U.S.

Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education

Statistics.

Ombudsman PLUS. (2015). Program accountability Ombudsman Plus Waukegan Public

Schools District 60. *Report on results 2015-2016*.

Palmon, S., Cathcart, A., Lembeck, P., & Peterson, R. (2015, January). Service Learning Community Service. *Service Brief*, 1-8.

Sessoms, G. (n.d.). Importance of Attendance in Work Ethics. Retrieved June 16, 2016, from <http://work.chron.com/importance-attendance-work-ethics-5082.html>

Strickland, J. (2014). Beyond Compulsory Schooling - Alternatives to School. Retrieved November 27, 2016, from <http://alternativestoschool.com/2014/11/24/beyond-compulsory-schooling/>

Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond (2009) American Youth Policy Forum. (n.d.). Retrieved October 07, 2016, from <http://www.aypf.org/resources/successateverystep/>

Values, morals and ethics. (n.d.). Retrieved June 16, 2016, from [http://changingminds.org/explanations/values/values\\_morals\\_ethics.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/values/values_morals_ethics.htm) 2/3