

**FINAL REPORT
OF THE
INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION**



**Indiana Legislative Services Agency
200 W. Washington Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204**

October, 2010

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2010

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A copy of this report is available on the Internet. Reports, minutes, and notices are organized by committee. This report and other documents for this Committee can be accessed from the General Assembly Homepage at <http://www.in.gov/legislative/>.

I. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL DIRECTIVE

The Legislative Council directed the Committee to study the following:

The causes and effects of, and solutions for, the problem of K-12 absenteeism.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK PROGRAM

The Committee met three times during the 2010 interim. At the first meeting, held on August 31, 2010, the Committee heard testimony concerning absenteeism in kindergarten through grade 12.

At the second meeting, held on September 30, 2010, the Committee heard testimony concerning the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.

At the third and final meeting, held on October 27, 2010, the Committee reviewed and voted on findings and recommendations, and approved the final report by a voice vote (10-0).

III. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

(For additional information, minutes and exhibits for the Committee are available on the Internet and can be accessed from the General Assembly homepage at <http://www.in.gov/legislative>.)

Absenteeism

Concerning absenteeism in kindergarten through grade 12, the Committee heard testimony that the average attendance rate in Indiana is 96%, and has not varied significantly over a 30 year period. The rate of chronic absenteeism (missing at least ten school days each year) stands at around 5%. Patterns of chronic absenteeism have been found in kindergarten and first grade students; these patterns generally continue throughout the students' school years, and are often early indicators of students who are likely to drop out, as well as indicating performance below grade level.

School corporations use a variety of strategies to combat chronic absenteeism, including the following:

- Participating in truancy diversion programs and the use of truancy officers with police powers. The existence of truancy diversion programs varies from county to county.
- Summer home visits, telephone calls from teachers and administrators, and attendance contracts that stress the importance of regular attendance.
- Providing alarm clocks and transportation for students for students who miss the school bus.
- Graduation coaches who work with students concerning school work and attendance.

- School-based health clinics, which allow students with minor health problems to return to class after treatment.
- Programs to increase family involvement in schools, which have been shown to improve attendance.

Early Childhood Education

Concerning the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, the Committee heard testimony that the approach was founded in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in 1947, and focuses on collaborative learning and the scientific method of inquiry. Children are encouraged to work with each other and their teachers to ask questions, formulate hypotheses, and prove or disprove the hypotheses, with the work being documented in images and writing. Every child is seen as capable, competent, and full of potential. The approach has been successful in programs for children of poverty: for example, in Indianapolis, St. Mary's Child Center has had 88% of its students enter kindergarten at or above grade level. In Warren Township, Marion County, the director of early childhood education considers the program to be the foundation of the success of the township's elementary schools. Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, Butler University will work with the Indianapolis Public Schools to establish a laboratory elementary school, which will use the approach in grades kindergarten through 5, while training more teachers in the approach.

IV. COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee made the following findings of fact:

- (1) School-based health clinics reduce absenteeism by keeping students in school. Passed by consent.
- (2) School attendance improves when access to integrated preventative and primary health care services is provided which ultimately provides a better opportunity to learn. Passed by consent.
- (3) Good health provides increased ability to focus on academics instead of untreated health problems. Passed by consent.
- (4) Monitoring absenteeism starting in kindergarten or preschool can be an effective strategy for identifying and addressing educational and familial issues early on before problems become more challenging. Passed by consent.
- (5) Schools and communities can embed attention to chronic absence into existing initiatives such as school readiness efforts, after-school programming, school-based health services, parent involvement programs and drop-out prevention programs. Passed by consent.

(6) Patterns of chronic absenteeism can be discerned in students in grades as early as kindergarten and grade 1. Passed by consent.

(7) Students who display patterns of chronic absenteeism in early grades tend to continue the pattern of chronic absenteeism throughout their school career. Passed by consent.

(8) Students who display patterns of chronic absenteeism in early grades are likely to fall behind academically. Passed by consent.

(9) Chronic absenteeism is often an early warning sign that a student is at risk of dropping out of school. Passed by consent.

(10) Elementary schools should look for patterns of chronic absenteeism in young students (grades K-3) and take steps to address the issue. Passed by consent.

(11) School corporations use a variety of strategies to combat absenteeism. Passed by consent.

(12) Successful early education programs, such as the Reggio Emilia approach, provide children with the skills necessary to become engaged, successful learners. Passed by consent.

(13) Research has shown that high quality early childhood education programs impact children's later learning and academic success. As Indiana focuses on ensuring that all children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade, we cannot afford to ignore the critical early years. Early childhood education lays the foundation for later learning and is critically important to children's success in school. Passed by consent.

The Committee made the following recommendations:

(1) The Department of Education should make absenteeism a policy priority and direct school corporations and schools to identify contributing factors and develop chronic absence reduction plans. Passed by consent.

(2) School corporations should share data on high chronic absence schools with the Indiana Department of Education and the Family and Social Services Administration to target allocation of resources and programs to improve school attendance. Passed by consent.

(3) School corporations should invest in professional development to help teachers and administrators understand the factors contributing to chronic absence and how to address them. Passed by consent.

(4) Early childhood educators should consider duplicating proven early education

programs, such as the Reggio Emilia approach, to ensure the success of all children.
Passed by consent.

(5) Early childhood education should be studied by the Indiana Education Roundtable.
Passed by consent.

WITNESS LIST

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