

Average Daily Attendance

2011 Interim

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Interim Work Plan:

Washington State currently uses a student-count method to determine school district funding based on a monthly count of enrollment. An alternative method would be based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The rationale for exploring an ADA-based student count is to provide districts with a financial incentive to maintain students' enrollment after the September count has been completed and to more accurately adjust, or target, resources to districts based on the students they serve throughout the course of the school year.

Staff will review other states' methods, including financial impacts on school districts if such information is available, and compile information as to what method has been most successful.

Background/Current Practice

Currently, student enrollment in Washington State is measured by way of monthly counts. These enrollment counts are the starting point used in state funding formulas to calculate allocations to schools for basic education, Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs, bilingual education, vocational, skills center, Running Start and other programs.

School districts report the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled on the fourth school day of September and on the first school day of October through May. (An FTE student is one enrolled four hours per day for Grades 1–3 and five hours per day for Grades 4–12.) These nine counts are then averaged to obtain an Annual Average FTE (AAFTE) enrollment and are used to determine districts' state funding.

In certain cases, students are excluded from the monthly counts. Students who are absent for more than 20 consecutive school days are not counted until they resume attendance.¹ Other excluded students include those who have transferred or dropped out, been suspended or expelled, have graduated, or are paying tuition.

¹ If there is a written agreement between the appropriate school official and a student's parent or guardian that the student's temporary absence is not deemed to cause a serious adverse effect upon the student's educational progress, the absent student may be counted as an enrolled student for up to two monthly enrollment count dates. Also, a student receiving home and/or hospital service is counted as an enrolled student.

2011 Budget Development

During 2011-13 budget development, members considered whether to convert from a monthly-count methodology to counting Average Daily Attendance (ADA) to encourage districts to focus on attendance. Using the most recently-available survey data from school year 2009-10, by district, the average rate of unexcused absence in grades 1–8 was estimated to be 0.36 percent and, in grades 9–12, 2.33 percent. These figures were translated to a weighted average unexcused-absence rate for all grades. Adjusting caseload forecasts for student FTE and, by extension, state general-apportionment by the weighted rate yielded an estimated budget savings of \$98.6 million for 2011-13.

The potential advantages of ADA were identified as:

- Explicitly encourages schools to emphasize attendance where the current fiscal system does not;
- Yields budget savings resulting from paying for actual students attending, using improved technology and more accurate data.

Concerns about the use of ADA included:

- Washington lacked a common, statewide definition for "excused" absence, leading to concerns about inconsistent application of the policy;
- Implementation of comprehensive data collection began in the 2011-12 school year, limiting the school-by-school analysis that could have been conducted in advance of changing to a new counting method;
- Many expressed concern that overhead and operating costs do not decline with a student's temporary absence;
- Potential to place a disproportionate fiscal impact on the schools with highest poverty rates² or high levels of student mobility.

Pending Additional State Information: New Definition and Data

The 2011-13 operating budget, 2ESHB 1087 (Chapter 50, Laws of 2011, PV), directed the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to establish a common, statewide definition of unexcused absence and begin collecting daily student attendance data by school.

Section 501(1)(a)(v): The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall, no later than August 1, 2011, establish a standard statewide definition of unexcused absence. The definition shall be reported to the ways and means committees of the senate and

² Analysis at the school-district level conducted during the 2011 Legislative session showed little correlation to rates of Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)-eligible students and surveyed unexcused absence rates. However, FRPL rates were measured at the district, rather than the school level, and survey data were sampled, rather than comprehensive, which led to concerns about drawing conclusions prior to the availability of more robust data.

house of representatives for legislative review in the 2012 legislative session. Beginning no later than January 1, 2012, districts shall report to the office of the superintendent of public instruction, daily student unexcused absence data by school.

On July 27, 2011, OSPI delivered draft definitions of excused and unexcused absences that were developed with the assistance of stakeholders.

Draft Statewide Definition of Excused and Unexcused Daily Absences:

Excused Daily Absences

The following are valid excuses for absences from school:

- A. Participation in a district or school approved activity or instructional program;
- B. Illness, health condition or medical appointment (including but not limited to medical, counseling, dental or optometry);
- C. Family emergency, including but not limited to a death or illness in the family;
- D. Religious or cultural purpose including observance of a religious or cultural holiday or participation in religious or cultural instruction;
- E. Court, judicial proceeding or serving on a jury;
- F. Post-secondary, technical school or apprenticeship program visitation, or scholarship interview;
- G. State-recognized search and rescue activities consistent with RCW 28A.225.055;
- H. Absence directly related to the student's homeless status;
- I. Absence resulting from a disciplinary/corrective action. (e.g., short-term or long-term suspension, emergency expulsion); and
- J. Principal (or designee) and parent, guardian, or emancipated youth mutually agreed upon approved activity.

The school principal (or designee) has the authority to determine if an absence meets the above criteria for an excused absence.

Unexcused Daily Absences

Any absence from school for the majority of hours or periods in an average school day is unexcused unless it meets one of the criteria above for an excused absence.

Daily attendance data, including whether the student is "excused" or "unexcused," will be collected using the new statewide definition beginning January 1, 2012. Legislators have an opportunity to amend the draft definitions prior to onset of data collection.

Commonly Used Student Count Mechanisms in Other States

Single Count Date – a count on one day near the beginning of the academic year. The single count date is a count of the number of students in attendance in each school district on a particular date – usually on or around October 1, which is when the federal government requires a count of the number of students eligible for the free- and reduced-price lunch program for purposes of Title 1 funding.

Advantages: Simple to administer and minimizes state costs.

Disadvantages: (1) School districts do not have a financial incentive to focus on retaining students after the count date. (2) Enrollment generally rises or falls from fall to spring. By basing funding on one fall count, districts are either over or under-funded. (3) School districts lack financial incentives to enroll out-of-school youth who try to enroll after the count date because the districts will not receive funding for those who enroll after October 1.

There are twelve states that use this mechanism: Colorado; Delaware; Connecticut; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Maryland; Massachusetts; Nevada; New Jersey; South Dakota; and West Virginia.

Multiple Count Dates – a calculation based on two or more count dates during the year. This mechanism takes a count of the number of students enrolled or in attendance on two or more nonconsecutive dates - one date is often in the fall and the other in the spring – with some specific percentage of a district’s funding based on the first count and the remainder based on the second. The multiple-count methodology allows for adjustment, or truing up, to changes in enrollment over the school year.

Advantages: Simple to administer. It encourages school districts to retain their students throughout most of the school year and provides a more accurate enrollment count than a single count date.

Disadvantages: (1) There remains a large degree of inaccuracy. (2) Schools are pressured to ensure that students are in attendance on those specific count dates.

There are nine states that use this mechanism: Arizona³; Georgia; Hawaii; Louisiana; Maine; Michigan; Montana; Washington; and Wisconsin.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA) – an average of a daily count during all or most of the year of students in attendance. A count is conducted every school day of students in attendance throughout the school year. Absent students are excluded from the daily count and the district’s average is lowered.

Advantages: School districts are encouraged to improve attendance to avoid funding reductions. School districts are financially incentivized to keep students in school and in attendance.

Disadvantages: (1) School district funding is reduced when students are absent, regardless of whether they are excused or unexcused. (2) This mechanism may require greater administrative costs due to ongoing counts.

³ Recently, Arizona passed legislation that changes the mechanism it uses from ADM to multiple count dates – September 15, November 15, January 15, and March 15 – effective for data collections in FY12. However, this change has been delayed for one year.

There are seven states that use this mechanism: California; Idaho (counts the 28 weeks in the school year with the highest ADA); Kentucky; Mississippi; Missouri; New York; and Texas.

Average Daily Membership (ADM) – an average of daily count during all or most of the year of students enrolled. School districts are based on an average of a count conducted every school day of students enrolled in a school throughout the school year. The daily count includes absent students.

Advantages: This mechanism leads to a more accurate student count. It also provides a financial incentive to keep students in school all year with no negative funding effect on districts for absent students.

Disadvantages: (1) No financial incentive is provided to school districts for increasing attendance because funding is provided based on students enrolled, whether or not they actually attend class. (2) This mechanism may require greater administrative costs due to ongoing counts.

There are fifteen states that use this mechanism: Arkansas (counts during the first three-quarters of the school year); Minnesota; Nebraska; New Hampshire; North Carolina; North Dakota; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; South Carolina; Tennessee; Utah (total days of membership of the previous school year divided by 180 days plus the percentage difference between fall enrollment (student enrollment count as of October 1st of the current school year and the fall enrollment count of the previous school year); Vermont; and Virginia (counts from the beginning of the school year through March 31).

Single Count Period – an average of a daily count during an established period of time near the beginning of the year. This mechanism is characterized by a specific, multi-week period, typically at the beginning of the school year that occurs for less than half of the school year.

Advantages: This mechanism yields a more accurate count than a single count date.

Disadvantages: (1) School districts have no financial incentive to retain or accept students after the single count period ends. (2) School districts lack financial incentives to enroll out-of-school youth who try to enroll after the count period because the districts will not receive funding for those who enroll after the count period ends.

There are four states that use this mechanism: Alabama uses ADM of the first 20 days after Labor Day; Alaska uses a 20 day count period; New Mexico uses ADM of the first 40 days of school; Wyoming.

Multiple Count Periods – an average of a daily count during two or more periods of time during the year. This mechanism is characterized by an average count of more than one specified period of time – week, month, multiple weeks/months – during the school year that amounts to less than half of the school year.

Advantages: Multiple count periods are more accurate than single count dates or periods and multiple count dates. They provide districts with a greater financial incentive to retain students. This mechanism may offer states lower administrative costs than longer counts.

Disadvantages: This mechanism is less accurate and provides less of a financial incentive to schools to keep students enrolled than counting students every day.

There are three states that use this mechanism: Florida uses one week in October and one week in February; Illinois uses ADA of the three-month period with the highest student attendance; Ohio uses ADM of the first full week in October and the first full week in February.

Summary of States' Practices:

Count Method	Number of States	States
Single Count Date	12	Colorado, Delaware, Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, South Dakota, and West Virginia.
Multiple Count Dates	9	Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Washington, and Wisconsin.
Average Daily Attendance (ADA)	7	California, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Texas.
Average Daily Membership (ADM)	15	Arkansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia.
Single Count Period	4	Alabama, Alaska, New Mexico, and Wyoming.
Multiple Count Periods	3	Florida, Illinois, and Ohio.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1.

Consider approving or amending the definitions of excused and unexcused absences drafted by the OSPI and communicate, in writing, to Superintendent Dorn the importance of beginning data collection in January 2012.

Two elements of potential weakness that Legislators might contemplate in reviewing the draft definitions are 1) item H - Absence directly related to the student's homeless status, and 2) item J - Principal (or designee) and parent, guardian, or emancipated youth mutually agreed upon approved activity. The former exclusion would seem to allow absences related to chronic or prolonged truancy accompanied by runaway status - a category of absent student that should

be monitored closely rather than exempted from attendance. The latter exclusion is perhaps so lenient as to impair the utility of a consistent, statewide definition.

The immediate onset of data collection will enable the Legislature to evaluate factors that might determine or predict district attendance levels. Any correlations with high concentrations of students with special needs (e.g., students in poverty, special education students, or English-language learners) and attendance patterns could be identified and potentially addressed if a statewide ADA policy were adopted.

Recommendation 2.

Consider adopting a modified ADA policy if action tying unexcused absences and funding is desired prior to the availability of additional, detailed data. Such a policy might be the two-pronged change proposed by Governor Gregoire including the addition of a June count date and shortening the permitted span of consecutive unexcused absences from 20 to five days.