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Report to Wisconsin School Districts on Implementation Surveys

Lois M. Quinn  
*University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, lquinn@uwm.edu*

John Pawasarat  
*University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, pawasara@uwm.edu*

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REPORT TO WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS ON THE SURVEY OF
SCHOOL OFFICIALS FOR THE WISCONSIN LEARNFARE EVALUATION

prepared by the Employment and Training Institute
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
February, 1991

In April, 1990 as part of its evaluation of the Wisconsin Learnfare experiment for the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Employment and Training Institute surveyed the district administrators of the 429 public school districts in Wisconsin to solicit information on the implementation of Learnfare in their districts. As promised, this report summarizes the survey responses.

351 school districts responded to the survey (82 percent of the total), including all districts in the state with forty or more AFDC teens under Learnfare was one hundred percent. (The lowest response rates were from school districts, including elementary only districts, with ten or fewer teens under Learnfare.) Most of the surveys were completed by the district administrator or the high school principal; in the larger districts the surveys were often forwarded to the director of pupil services for a response. The survey instrument with response totals is attached.

About a fourth of the districts reported that they have been involved in meetings with their county social service agency to discuss policies or programs relating to the implementation of Learnfare. Topics covered at these meetings most often focused on methods of defining or taking student attendance. Of the eighty-one districts who reported meeting with county and/or state officials, the following areas were reported discussed:

- methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens (58 districts)
- clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences (55 districts)
- methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements (53 districts)
- "Children at Risk" programs for students with poor attendance or returning dropouts (29 districts)
- use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens (26 districts)
- policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens (18 districts)
- use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens (13 districts)
- creation of special school programs for teen mothers (12 districts).

About a sixth of the districts reported that they had school staff involved in in-service training regarding the Learnfare policy. School
administrators were most likely to receive the training (so reported in 47 districts), followed by counselors (in 16 districts), teachers (in 5 districts), clerical staff (5 districts), and social workers (4 districts). Only four of the school districts with one hundred or more AFDC teens indicated that their staff had received in-service training, and none of these districts indicated that the training had involved teachers or social workers.

Policies varied as to how districts handled information on AFDC teens whose attendance is being monitored. Of those districts reporting that they receive names of AFDC teens for monthly monitoring, 38 percent provide the names to administrators, 25 percent forward the names to school social workers, counselors or psychologists, and 4 percent forward the names to teachers. Over 90 percent of the districts reporting said they did not receive names from the county or state of AFDC teens who have dropped out of school.

A number of districts reported that their attendance policies have been revised during the last three years, including new or clarified definitions of unexcused absences, new methods for notifying parents of absences, new or clarified definitions of a "full-day" absence, and computerized records of absences. These changes were usually attributed to the Compulsory School Attendance and Truancy Prevention Act, enacted in 1988, or to both this law and Learnfare. Many districts also expanded their "Children At-Risk" Programs, again primarily in response to recent changes in state law governing the "Children At-Risk" programs. Nearly all of the districts with high schools are offering special school programs for teen parents, usually operated by the local district. The programs include home-bound instruction, alternative education programs, parenting classes, and classes in independent living. A small number of districts reported offering on-site day care, and only a few provide transportation to and from day care for children of teen parents.

In addition to questions about the implementation of Learnfare, school district officials were asked in their opinion, what changes in the attendance of AFDC teens they would attribute to Learnfare. Thirty percent of those responding checked "improved attendance," 1 percent checked "poorer attendance," 56 percent checked "no observed change," and 13 percent checked "don't know." A second question asked, "In your opinion, what changes in the academic performance of AFDC teens in your district would you attribute to the Learnfare policy?" Fourteen percent of those responding checked "improved school performance," less than 1 percent checked "poorer school performance," 66 percent checked "no observed change," and 19 percent checked "don't know." For both questions, districts with fewer Learnfare teens were less likely to report improvements in student attendance or performance. It should be noted that while districts are provided the names of their teens on monthly monitoring of attendance they may be unaware of all other teens who are under the Learnfare requirement. Seventy-two districts reported that their staff had "observed dropouts returning to school where Learnfare or AFDC payments were identified as a reason." Of these districts, sixty responded to a follow-up question and estimated that one to twenty dropouts had returned, for a total of 214 teens in those districts.
Public School Survey for the Wisconsin Learnfare Evaluation

1. About how many teenagers are under the Learnfare requirements in your school district, as far as you know?
   - none
   - 250.1 to 20
   - 26.21 to 100
   - over 100

2. Have county officials or staff from the county social service agency met with your school staff to discuss policies or programs relating to the implementation of Learnfare?
   - yes
   - no

   If yes, what areas were discussed? (Please check all that apply.)
   - methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements
   - policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens
   - clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences
   - methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens
   - "Children At-Risk Programs" for students with poor attendance or returning dropouts
   - use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens
   - use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens
   - creation of special school programs for teen mothers
   - other (Please describe)

   If yes, who was the contact person at the county?
   - Name: _______________________
   - Position: ____________________
   - County: ______________________

3. Have staff from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services met with your school officials regarding the implementation of Learnfare?
   - yes
   - no

   If yes, what areas were discussed? (Please check all that apply.)
   - methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements
   - policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens
   - clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences
   - methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens
   - "Children At-Risk Programs" for returning school dropouts
   - use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens
   - use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens
   - creation of special school programs for teen mothers
   - other (Please identify)

4. Were any of your staff involved in in-service training regarding the Learnfare policy?
   - yes
   - no

   If yes, please indicate which staff received training. (Please check all that apply.)
   - 5 teachers
   - 4 social workers
   - 2 counselors
   - clerical staff
   - 1 other (Identify)

   If yes, who provided the training? (Check all that apply)
   - 9 school district
   - 7 Wisconsin Dept. of Health and Social Services
   - 5 other (Please identify)

5. About how many teen mothers do you have in your school district?

6. Do you provide transportation to and from day care for children of teen parents in your schools?
   - yes
   - no
7. Does your school district offer on-site day care or day care near the school for children of teen parents?
   321 no  22 yes
   If yes, about how many children are in day care this semester? ___
   If yes, when did you first establish this day care? ____________________
       (Month and year)

8. Do you offer special school programs for teen parents?
   246 yes  99 no
   If yes, what areas are offered? (Check all that apply)
   146 parenting classes
   90 classes in independent living
   169 home-based instruction
   189 other (Please describe) __________________________
   If yes, who operates these programs? (Check all that apply)
   234 local school district
   14 community-based organizations
   15 VTA£ district (Which VTA£ district?) __________________________
   27 other (Please identify) __________________________
   If yes, about how many teen parents are enrolled in these programs this semester? ___

9. Does your school district receive names of AFDC teens from the county whose school attendance is monitored monthly?
   205 yes  119 no  22 don't know
   If yes, do any school staff receive the names for follow-up services? (Check any that apply)
   51 social workers, counselors or psychologists
   78 administrators
   9 teachers
   6 others (Please identify) __________________________
   11 Doesn't apply. The school does not receive names of AFDC teens for verification of attendance.
   40 Don't know

10. Does your school district receive names of AFDC teens from the county or the state who have dropped out of school?
    17 yes  279 no  47 don't know
    If yes, which school staff, if any, are assigned to contact these teens? (Check any that apply)
    10 social workers or counselors
    2 clerical staff
    17 teachers
    11 administrators
    2 other (Please identify) __________________________
    1 none
    11 Doesn't apply. The school does not receive names of AFDC teens who have dropped out of school.

11. What changes in social services provided to AFDC families with teens would you attribute to the Learnfare policy, if any? (Check all that apply)
    35 increased contact with AFDC families by school social workers, counselors or psychologists
    37 increased contact with county social service staff regarding AFDC families
    48 improved cooperation between school and county social service staff
    33 no changes observed
    70 don't know
12. Do you provide counseling to families whose AFDC monthly benefits are reduced because of their teen's failure to attend school regularly?

28 yes 132 no 103 unsure which families are sanctioned 12 don't know

13. During the last three years the state legislature has established Learnfare requirements for AFDC teens and revised compulsory attendance and truancy laws for all teens. What changes in your attendance policies, if any, would you attribute to either of these legislative acts? (Check all that apply under "Learnfare Policy," "Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Laws," or "Both."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learnfare Policy</th>
<th>Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Law</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>232 new or clarified definitions of unexcused absences 3</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58 new procedures for taking classroom attendance</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131 new or clarified definitions of a full-day absence</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136 computerized records of absences</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144 new methods for notifying parents of absences 2</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 other (Please identify)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61 no changes

14. Have you expanded your "Children At-Risk Program" in the last two years?

272 yes 69 no 6 don't know

If yes, why did you expand the program? (Check any reasons that apply)

206 to address changes in the "Children At-Risk" legislation

24 to meet the needs of teens under the Learnfare requirement

147 to address a local initiative

14 other

Please describe briefly:

15. What cooperative arrangements for school programing would you attribute to the Learnfare policy, if any? (Check all that apply.)

258 no change

39 don't know

28 increased alternative education programs with community-based organizations

17 decreased alternative education programs with community-based organizations

24 increased programs with the VTAE district

14 decreased programs with the VTAE district

1 other

Please briefly describe these programs:

16. In your opinion, what changes in the attendance of AFDC teens in your districts would you attribute to the Learnfare policy?

103 improved attendance

192 no observed change

45 don't know

Comments:
17. In your opinion, what changes in the academic performance of AFDC teens in your district would you attribute to the Learnfare policy?

48 improved school performance
2 poorer school performance
226 no observed change
66 don't know

Comments:

18. Have you or your staff observed any dropouts returning to school where Learnfare or AFDC payments were identified as a reason?

72 yes
231 no
41 don't know

If yes, about how many dropouts have you observed returning where Learnfare or AFDC payments were identified as a reason?

Comments:

We welcome additional comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Learnfare policy:

Thank you for your assistance. If you would like to receive a copy of the report on this survey, please indicate.  

Yes, send me a copy.

Name of Person Completing Survey: __________________________

Title: ___________________________________________________

Name of School District: ____________________________ Phone: ( ) __________

Please return this survey to: Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201. Phone (414) 229-4934.