

**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  
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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?

57 none                      250 1 to 20                      26 21 to 100                      10 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?

77 yes                      243 no                      29 don't know

If yes, what areas were discussed? (Please check all that apply.)

50 methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements  
16 policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens  
52 clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences  
54 methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens  
28 "Children At-Risk Programs" for students with poor attendance or returning dropouts  
12 use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens  
25 use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens  
10 creation of special school programs for teen mothers  
5 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?

21 yes                      285 no                      42 don't know

If yes, what areas were discussed? (Please check all that apply.)

13 methods of notifying AFDC clients about the Learnfare requirements  
5 policies for waiving school attendance for older AFDC teens  
14 clarification of school definitions of unexcused absences  
16 methods of reporting school attendance of AFDC teens  
6 "Children At-Risk Programs" for returning school dropouts  
3 use of school social workers to assist AFDC teens  
5 use of county social workers to assist AFDC teens  
5 creation of special school programs for teen mothers  
5 other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Were any of your staff involved in in-service training regarding the Learnfare policy?

52 yes                      265 no                      30 don't know

If yes, please indicate which staff received training. (Please check all that apply.)

5 teachers                      4 social workers                      47 administrators  
16 counselors                      5 clerical staff                      6 other (Identify) \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, who provided the training? (Check all that apply)

9 school district                      7 Wisconsin Dept. of Health and Social Services  
15 CESA                      6 other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_  
26 county social service department

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?

15 yes                      319 no



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      192 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.")

	Learnfare Policy	Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Law	Both
<u>232</u> new or clarified definitions of unexcused absences	<u>3</u>	<u>171</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>68</u> new procedures for taking classroom attendance	<u>--</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>131</u> new or clarified definitions of a full-day absence	<u>7</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>118</u> computerized records of absences	<u>3</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>144</u> new methods for notifying parents of absences	<u>2</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>18</u> other (Please identify) _____	<u>--</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>
<hr/>			
<u>61</u> no changes			
<u>11</u> don't know			

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  
34 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 programming 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  
1 decreased alternative education programs with community-based organizations  
24 increased programs with the VTAE district  
-- decreased programs with the VTAE district  
3 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  
4 poorer attendance      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.