



## Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

---

### Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations in Support of Senate Bill 122

April 16, 2015

The Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (WSSWA) would like to thank Senator Harris Dodd, Chairman Farrow, Representatives Genrich and Kitchens, and the many other co-sponsors of Senate Bill 122, for authoring this important piece of legislation. SB 122 is a common sense bill that will save money, encourage efficiency and make the very important responsibility of combating truancy more effective and timely.

Specifically, SB 122 will give school districts the ability to contact the parents or guardians of habitual truants via first class mail. Under current law, this must be done by registered or certified mail. SB 122 will also allow for simultaneous electronic communication.

In October 2014, the WSSWA Legislative Committee conducted a survey of our state's school social workers on the topic of truancy and attendance. The survey found that 97% of our state's school social workers are directly involved in their schools' truancy plan.

The survey also asked school social workers what changes they would like to see to state law to help in addressing the issue of truancy. Respondents pointed to the registered-or-certified mail requirement as outdated, inefficient and ineffective. In discussions since the survey was conducted, many leaders in the school social work community have highlighted the need to also include electronic means in this process.

WSSWA encourages committee members to support SB 122 when it is brought up in executive session. We thank you in advance for your support of this bill and look forward to continuing to work with you to update and improve our state's truancy and attendance laws.

## Truancy Testimony

- Intro- name, credentials, school district, district size, years employed
- Role in attendance/truancy:
  - I send all certified letters requesting truancy meetings; follow-up with calls or home visits for no-shows
  - Cite or refer parents or students for truancy if attendance does not improve
- This year's stats for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> quarters of school year:
  - 72 certified letters sent, 27 returned = 38% returned non-deliverable
  - Of the 45 signed for, 29 parents no-showed the requested meeting = 64% no-show rate for parents who received letters; only 22% overall attendance rate for letters sent
  - 72 letters sent = \$467.28 @ \$6.49 a letter.
    - \$363.44 spent on letters that resulted in a no-show meeting
    - \$175.23 spent on letters that were undeliverable
  - These stats reflect costs to a small, rural district. Imagine the cost for a district like Milwaukee that has schools as large as our entire district, and has a much higher rate of truancy. The cost would be astronomical.
- Additionally, certified letters in themselves cause a barrier to parents' attendance at truancy meetings. Because these letters have to be signed for, well-intentioned parents are not able to receive them because they are not at home during regular postal business hours to sign for the letters. While this requirement was original meant to assist in the truancy process, it has really done nothing but hinder the process.
- In the fall of 2014, state-wide survey was sent out to all school social workers in Wisconsin. This survey asked about prospective changes to state statute that would assist in the truancy process, and school social workers frequently cited the elimination of the certified letter requirement as something that would be helpful.
  - Stop sending habitual truancy letters (certified). These are not effective but they are costly in both time and money that could be used towards more effective measures.
  - Certified letters do not work - it costs a lot of money for schools.
  - I feel the certified letters are a huge waste of money (as well as time). Many of the letters are returned unclaimed and very few parents show up for the truancy conference with the administrator.