

Massachusetts
Department
of Children
and Families

School Attendance for Children/Youth in DCF Custody: School Year 2020-21, MP1

School Year 2020-21, Marking Period 1:
School Year Start through 10/01/2020

Release Date:
April 2021



DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Vision

All children have the right to grow up in a nurturing home, free from abuse and neglect, with access to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and education.

Mission

Strive to protect children from abuse and neglect and, in partnership with families and communities, ensure children are able to grow and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.

Goals

Work toward establishing the safety, permanency and well-being of the Commonwealth's children by: stabilizing and preserving families, providing quality temporary alternative care when necessary, safely reunifying families, and, when necessary and appropriate, creating new families through kinship, guardianship, or adoption.

Executive Summary

Pursuant to Section 110 of Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020, the FY2021 budget, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) submits this follow-up report regarding the statewide coordinated efforts undertaken by DCF and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to monitor student attendance. DCF submitted an initial report on January 15, 2021 and submits this follow-up data report which summarizes attendance data from the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Please see the appendix for a copy of the initial report.

The law requires:

SECTION 110. Not later than January 15, 2021, the department of children and families, in coordination with the department of elementary and secondary education, where applicable, shall report on statewide efforts taken since March 16, 2020 to monitor student attendance for children with active cases at the department of children and families, whether school participation is virtual, in-person, or a hybrid thereof, and shall report on any steps taken, or barriers to, ensuring active coordination between said agencies for the purpose of monitoring student attendance and meaningful school engagement with families who have active cases at the department of children and families.

As noted in our January report, DCF receives refreshed DESE data on school attendance for children in DCF custody three times per year, typically in December, April, and August after DESE certifies its Student Information Management System (SIMS) data. In December 2020, DCF received school year 2020-21 marking period 1 data covering from the start of the 2020-2021 school year to 10/1/2020. Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the School Year 2020-2021 attendance data did not require a distinction between mode of instruction since students attended school in-person. For School Year 2020-2021, DESE now receives attendance data from school districts that reports whether the child attended school in-person or remotely. DESE provides this information to DCF for children and youth in DCF custody.¹

Following a protocol established through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Early and Secondary Education, the Department of Children and Families provides a comprehensive list of children and youth in DCF custody to DESE on a fixed schedule. Because DCF and DESE maintain unique identifiers for each child/youth/student, this data is matched based on the student's name and date of birth. Name and date of birth matching relies on a "close match" between data sets. Because DESE/DCF's name spelling, and dates of birth do not always align, the matching protocol generally yields a match rate of about 80%. Once this information is received by DCF, aggregate data findings are used to identify trends and areas of concern. The data is also part of the Department's case management system and is reviewed by social workers as part of their ongoing work to monitor and document education progress.

Key findings from the School Year 2020-21 Marking Period 1 include:

- 42.9% of instruction for matched DCF children and youth (5,191) was conducted in-person, 54.6% remote, and 2.5% did not have the mode of instruction reported by the school district.
 - Matched DCF students who participated in in-person instruction attended 93% of the time.
 - Matched DCF students who participated in remote instruction attended 88% of the time.

¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021, September 21). Attendance definitions and reporting guidance for remote learning. Retrieved April 07, 2021, from <https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/sims/attendance.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Department%20of,be%20counted%20as%20present.1>

More details on attendance by birth sex, race/ethnicity, grade level, special education level of need and DCF placement type is included in the charts that follow.

I. DESE/DCF Data Exchange and Match Rate

DCF receives an electronic data exchange from DESE for matched children and youth in DCF custody. The exchange covers three school marking periods (i.e., MP1, MP2, and MP3 defined in Table 1). This report summarizes school attendance for School Year 2020-21 MP1 (school year start through 10/01/2020).

As summarized in Table 1, DESE provides school attendance data on a fixed reporting schedule. These attendance rates are not available in real-time. Please refer to the appendix for the initial report that shared information on this timeline.

TABLE 1. DESE to DCF Reporting Schedule 2020-2021	School Attendance Data as of Date	Exchange Date with DCF	Approximate Date Available for DCF Reporting
Marking Period 1	October 1	November 14	April 1*
Marking Period 2	March 1	April 14	May 1
Marking Period 3	Last day of school	July 14	August 1

*Initial reporting on mode of instruction was protracted to accommodate necessary DCF case management system file structure modifications.

Table 2 reveals a DESE match rate of 78.4% for children and youth in DCF custody enrolled in grades K-12 during School Year 2020-21, MP1. This rate is in line with prior matches.

TABLE 2. DESE Match Rate for Children/Youth in DCF Custody Enrolled in Grades K-12	DCF Children/Youth (K-12) in Custody	DCF Children/Youth (K-12) Matched by DESE	% Matched
Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	6,619	5,191	78.4%

II. Mode of Instruction for Children and Youth in DCF Custody

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the start of School Year 2020-21 in many districts across the Commonwealth. Additionally, the pandemic resulted in school districts providing multiple modalities of instruction, including a traditional “in-person” mode of instruction, “remote” instruction, and/or hybrid modalities. As reflected in Table 3, DESE and local districts revised reporting structures to include these modes of instruction.

TABLE 3. Mode of Instruction Reflected in DESE Reporting

In-Person	Instruction provided in a traditional classroom setting (i.e., in-person attendance)
Remote	Instruction provided through technology via remote log-in (e.g., computer, tablet, smartphone)
Mode of Instruction Not Reported	Mode of instruction not defined in the data set provided by DESE to DCF

Table 4 reflects that 42.9% of instruction for matched DCF children and youth (5,191) was conducted in-person, 54.6% remote, and 2.5% did not have the mode of instruction reported by the school district.

TABLE 4. Mode of Instruction Distribution within the DESE/DCF Attendance Data Set	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported
Count of Enrolled Days*	30,515	38,791	1,804
Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	42.9%	54.6%	2.5%

*Count of Enrolled Days: This is the sum of enrolled school days within a mode of instruction (e.g., a student may have been enrolled for a total of 20 In-Person and 10 Remote instruction days during MP1).

III. School Attendance Rates for Children and Youth in DCF Custody

The DESE data set includes sufficient student level detail to calculate school attendance rates. These include:

- School Days Enrolled
- School Days Attended
- School Days Absent

$$\text{Attendance Rate} = \frac{\text{School Days in Attendance}}{\text{School Days Enrolled}} \times 100\%$$

Table 5 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by mode of instruction for matched children and youth in DCF custody for MP1. The corresponding marking period for School Year 2019-20 is provided for comparison. While in-person school attendance rates remained consistent year-over-year, remote and mode of instruction not reported attendance rates lowered the overall rate by 3% in School Year 2020-21.

TABLE 5. Attendance Rate by Mode of Instruction

Mode of Instruction	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
Marking Period 1: School Year 2019-20	93%	n/a	n/a	93%
Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

NOTE: The attendance rate for children/youth with an undesignated mode of instruction was 76%. These students accounted for 2.5% of the total enrolled days.

Table 6 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by reported birth sex.

TABLE 6. Attendance Rate by Birth Sex

Birth Sex	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
Female	94%	89%	82%	91%
Male	93%	88%	72%	90%
Total Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

NOTE: There were no Intersex or Missing Birth Sex entries in the matched DESE data.

Table 7 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by race/ethnicity.

TABLE 7. Attendance Rate by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
White	93%	89%	79%	91%
Hispanic/Latinx (of any race)	93%	87%	76%	89%
Black	95%	88%	79%	91%
Asian	97%	88%	78%	92%
Native American	98%	91%	-	95%
Pacific Islander	92%	-	-	92%
Multi-Racial (two or more races)	93%	90%	73%	91%
Unable to Determine/Declined	89%	85%	61%	85%
Total Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic/Latinx origin. Race/Ethnicity sorted by population size distribution.

- Mode of instruction was reported for 100% of Native American children/youth in the data set.
- In-person instruction was reported for 100% of the Pacific Islander children/youth in the data set.

Table 8 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by DESE Student Information Management System (SIMS) Grade Group.

TABLE 8. Attendance Rate by SIMS Grade Group

SIMS Grade Group	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
K – 5 Grades	95%	92%	74%	92%
6 – 8 Grades	92%	88%	81%	90%
9 – 12 Grades	93%	85%	76%	89%
Total Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

Table 9 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by DESE Special Education Level of Need.

TABLE 9. Attendance Rate by SIMS Special Education Level of Need

Special Education Level of Need	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
High	96%	89%	74%	94%
Moderate	92%	86%	64%	88%
Low – 2 hours or more of services per week	88%	88%	59%	87%
Low – less than 2 hours of services per week	89%	89%	19%	89%
Does Not Apply to Student	91%	89%	82%	89%
Total Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

Table 10 summarizes school attendance rate distribution by DCF placement type.

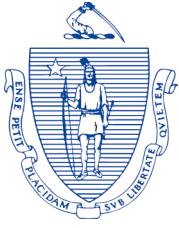
TABLE 10. Attendance Rate by DCF Placement Type

DCF Placement Type	In-Person	Remote	Mode of Instruction Not Reported	ALL MODES
Departmental Foster Care	92%	91%	78%	91%
Comprehensive Foster Care	93%	90%	66%	91%
Congregate Care (e.g., group home, residential school)	96%	85%	64%	92%
STARR (short-term residential)	86%	71%	77%	76%
Non-Referral Location (e.g., hospital, other state agency)	97%	91%	78%	87%
Total Marking Period 1: School Year 2020-21	93%	88%	76%	90%

Conclusion

DESE and DCF work together to improve our data collection and ensure students in the custody of DCF attending and succeeding in school. To improve the match rate between DCF and DESE, a common identifier across state agencies or shared data system would need to be established while preserving required confidentiality. DCF and DESE also continue to work together to overcome challenges to remote learning and ensure as many children as possible are attending school in-person.

Appendix



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MARYLOU SUDDERS
 Secretary

LINDA S. SPEARS
 Commissioner

January 15, 2021

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka, Senate President
 State House, Room 332
 24 Beacon St.
 Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Ronald Mariano, House Speaker
 State House Room 343
 24 Beacon St.
 Boston, MA 02133

Dear President Spilka and Speaker Mariano,

Pursuant to Section 110 of *Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020*, the FY2021 budget, I write to provide an update on the work of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to ensure children in the Department’s custody are attending school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The law requires:

SECTION 110. Not later than January 15, 2021, the department of children and families, in coordination with the department of elementary and secondary education, where applicable, shall report on statewide efforts taken since March 16, 2020 to monitor student attendance for children with active cases at the department of children and families, whether school participation is virtual, in-person, or a hybrid thereof, and shall report on any steps taken, or barriers to, ensuring active coordination between said agencies for the purpose of monitoring student attendance and meaningful school engagement with families who have active cases at the department of children and families.

For children who remain in the custody of their parent or guardian, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) ensures that the child is enrolled and attending school. For children who are in the Department’s custody, DCF works with the child, their biological parent/guardian, their foster parent or congregate care provider, and school to support the child’s educational needs and maintain, whenever possible, educational stability for the child. Social workers review and maintain up-to-date information on the child’s educational placement, attendance, and performance that is maintained in either narrative or in structured fields within i-FamilyNet, DCF’s automated case management system.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the many changes it has led to in schools throughout the Commonwealth, brings additional challenges to DCF’s work to ensure children receive the best education possible. This

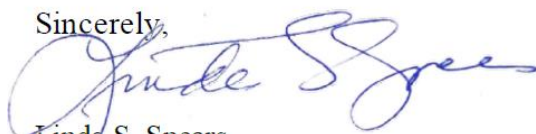
fall, DCF shared guidance with social workers and foster parents about how to make the best decision possible for whether the children would attend school in person or remotely, if they had an option. The education decision maker for each child was able to select the option they felt was best for the child and DCF staff worked to support this decision. It is important to note that a child's education decision maker may be the child's parent or foster parent, and for children with special needs it may be the Special Education Surrogate Parent.

To address the education needs of children, DCF and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have closely collaborated since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.

- DCF receives refreshed DESE data on school attendance for children in DCF custody three times per year, typically in December, April, and August, the months after DESE certifies its Student Information Management System (SIMS) data.
 - In December 2020, DCF received school year 2020-21 marking period 1 data. DCF will receive marking period 2 data in April 2021.
 - For School Year 2020-2021, DESE is receiving attendance data from school districts data that notes whether the child attended school in- person or remotely. DESE will share this information with DCF.
- In addition to our data sharing agreement, DCF and DESE have worked together during the pandemic to ensure children in DCF custody are receiving the best education possible. For example, DESE's Special Education Guidance issued on July 9, 2020 provided districts criteria for identifying students with complex and significant needs to prioritize for in person learning. One of the criteria was if a student was in foster care.
- DESE issued guidance on August 17, 2020 addressed compensatory services for special education students as a result of COVID-19. In the guidance, DESE included students in foster care as one of the groups to receive priority in scheduling IEP meetings to discuss compensatory services related to COVID-19.
- In June 2020, DCF and DESE jointly developed a tip sheet for educators on best practices for working with students during remote learning. This month, DESE reissued the tip sheet as an expanded document, "Promoting Student Engagement, Learning, Wellbeing and Safety During Remote and Hybrid Learning."
- During August and September 2020, DCF and DESE's Joint Education Stability Team coordinated 25 joint school reopening meetings between DCF Area Office staff and approximately 230 school districts throughout the Commonwealth. These meetings provided a forum to improve communication, share concerns and ensure children and families had all the tools needed to participate in-person or remote schooling.
 - During January and February 2021, DCF and DESE are hosting another round of regional meetings to ensure students are well supported during the second semester.

I deeply appreciate the Legislature's support of DCF's work, especially during the unprecedented challenges we have all experienced this past year. DCF will prepare a follow-up report regarding the statewide coordinated efforts undertaken by DCF and DESE that will include attendance data from the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year on April 15, 2021.

Sincerely,



Linda S. Spears
Commissioner