

Madison Education Partnership - Request for Proposals 2018

Overview

The Madison Education Partnership, a research-practice partnership between the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) and Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), requests proposals from University faculty, research staff and advanced graduate students (with a faculty member as Principal Investigator) to conduct research under this partnership on questions related to school attendance in MMSD. Below we describe the partnership, topic of focus for 2018-19 and details of proposal submission.

Background - Madison Education Partnership

The Madison Education Partnership (MEP) supports researchers and practitioners working together to generate high-quality research, develop evidence-based interventions and disseminate new knowledge in the district and beyond in order to improve students' educational opportunities and outcomes. Through the MEP structure, supported researchers are provided with financial and technical support and expedited access to the district. The MEP Steering Committee, Advisory Group, and Directors jointly determine the research focus for both internally and externally generated research. For more information about MEP's organization and structure please visit www.mep.wceruw.org.

Request for Proposals: Topic Focus – School Attendance

In spring of 2018, MEP released a report on attendance and absenteeism among children in grades K-3. This report explores factors contributing to higher levels of excused and unexcused absences and the relationship between attendance and academic and social outcomes. MEP is now seeking proposals to extend this work to better understand the reasons why MMSD students attend or miss school and the impact of absenteeism on student academic, social, and health outcomes. An overarching goal for this research is to identify possible actions the district could take to raise attendance.

One of the most common ways researchers have tried to understand school attendance is to examine absenteeism, or the failure to attend. Understanding the causes of absenteeism may provide education leaders with useful information to boost attendance. Chronic absenteeism, or missing more than 18 days of school per year, is an early indicator of school disengagement. Our report suggests that 18 is not a magic number and that the effects of excused and unexcused absences are different. A recent study from Gershenson et al (2017) also finds unexcused absences are twice as harmful as excused absences¹. Beyond the impacts of missing school on individual students, high rates of absenteeism in schools could have negative consequences for all students in the school, including deleterious impacts on the quality of classroom instruction and school climate.² Studies have shown that in the early years of schooling (3rd grade and before) missing 10% or more of school predicts lower levels of numeracy and literacy by the time a student reaches 3rd grade and poor attendance in early years can also have ramifications into high school. Students of color and students with disabilities are also disproportionately negatively affected by chronic absenteeism³. MEP recognizes the importance of addressing disparities in student attendance in MMSD to guarantee positive equitable outcomes for all students in the district.

¹ Gershenson, S., et al. (2017). "Are Student Absences Worth the Worry in U.S. Primary Schools?" *Education Finance and Policy* **12**(2): 137-165.

² Olson, L. (2017) "Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance", BERCC Policy Brief

³ Chang, H., Balfanz, R. (2016) "Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence". Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center Research Brief.

This call for proposals is broadly focused on school attendance. We are seeking rigorous and innovative proposals that build on or complement work MEP has already sponsored on this topic. This RFP does not limit proposals to specific research concepts. Some areas of interest may be:

- *Causes of absenteeism and patterns of attendance:* How, if at all, do causes of absenteeism vary among students and over grades? What are the leading factors contributing to student attendance patterns? What are leading causes of absenteeism that are potentially preventable by changes in policy and programs?
- *Promoting attendance and preventing chronic absenteeism:* What policies and practices have schools enacted to promote attendance and/or reduce absenteeism? What have they found effective? Are there ways researchers and schools can partner to create or import innovations to promote attendance/reduce absenteeism?
- *Approaches to reducing the impact of absenteeism in schools:* How if at all do responses to absenteeism vary among schools? Rather than changing the patterns of school attendance, are there things schools can do or are doing to reduce the effects of absenteeism on education outcomes?

Award Details

Expected funding: Two projects will be funded up to \$50,000 each (direct costs). We will consider projects with higher budgets and will also consider funding more than two projects based on the applicant pool. These projects will be funded by WCER.

Expected term of award: Award notices will be given in early July. MEP prefers projects that are one year or less in duration but will consider projects that extend beyond one year based on justification of extended timeline.

Allowable expenses: Funds may be used to pay for PI time, research assistance, tuition remission, materials or travel. Other expenses directly related to research may be permissible as well based upon approval from the MEP Directors.

Additional Benefits to the Researcher:

- Expedited district approval to undertake the proposed research; no need for MMSD External Research Committee review of projects. *Researchers are still responsible for securing approval for research from the UW IRB.
- Streamlined access to research sites, parents, teachers and students.
- Access to administrative data and support from MMSD's [Research & Program Evaluation Office](#) and MEP project staff to facilitate understanding of the data.
- Direct access to district policy makers to disseminate research results, increasing the likelihood that research will be used to drive decision-making at the district level.

Additional Obligations of Selected Researchers:

- Provide the Steering Committee and Directors with an interim report on project progress in early spring in the form of a one-page research brief. A final report will also be furnished to the Steering Committee and Directors at the end of the grant period. The final report will be presented in combination with an oral presentation of findings.
- Submit a 1-3 page, non-technical executive summary to be distributed to stakeholders in the district.
- Present at least twice on this work; once to the Steering Committee and Advisory Group and once to a broader community of stakeholders and practitioners at the annual MEP Research Symposium.
- Providing any reports or presentations disseminated outside the research team and MEP to the Steering Committee for preview at least thirty days in advance of presentation.
- Communicate regularly with the appropriate district lead as your research progresses. MEP staff will facilitate primary points of connection with the district.

**Under no circumstances may MMSD or MEP prevent publication or dissemination of research results once researchers have satisfied their disclosure and review obligations.*

Proposal Priorities

The MEP Directors and Steering Committee will review submitted proposals.

Proposal Q & A: The MEP Directors will host a question and answer session on April 30th from 11:00 – 12:00 pm in the Education Sciences building 13th floor conference room (1025 W. Johnson St.). All potential applicants are welcome to attend. Please email Project Manager Dominique Bradley (dust@wisc.edu) to RSVP.

Proposals will be scored on: *(Please see attached rubric for exact scoring language)*

- *Relevance:* Will the results be of use to policy makers and/or practitioners seeking to enhance the quality and/or equity of education in the district? Does the proposal clearly seek to address a problem of practice and outcome(s) relevant to attendance in MMSD?
- *Methodological Rigor:* Does the proposal clearly outline an empirical strategy and does that strategy serve to address the research questions? Will the empirical strategy produce valid, replicable results? **Given the quantitative focus of MEP Directed work we have a slight preference for research that includes qualitative methodology or components.**
- *Personnel/Feasibility:* Does the PI have the relevant substantive and methodological expertise and experience to do this research? Has the PI committed adequate time to carry out a high-quality research program? Are the requests for administrative data and/or participation of MMSD personnel, students or families reasonable?
- *Potential:* Does the proposed work seem likely to contribute to future publications and/or funding? Does the proposed work fit into a program of research for the PI—either as an emergent trajectory of part of an established line of inquiry?

Proposal Guidelines

Deadline for Submission of Proposals: May 21, 2018

Contents of Proposal: Please submit proposals in PDF format.

All proposals must include the following elements:

- Cover Page: Project title, PI name and title, and names and title of any supporting researchers.
- Project Description: A brief review of the significance of the problem you will address, research questions, and research design/methodology. No more than 3 pages of text for this section.
- Project Budget: Completed Budget Detail form, and a brief justification of expenses. No more than 1 page total. (Please see attached Budget Detail Sheet)
- Timeline for Study: Timeline for all research activities including project preparation and dissemination of results. Please specify which activities will occur directly in schools or with school staff. All direct research activities must occur within a 12-month timeframe.
- Personnel: Brief one-paragraph bios for each PI and supporting staff, and Primary Investigator(s) Curriculum Vita(e).

If necessary, MEP Directors will reach out to the PIs for further clarification as the proposals are reviewed. All PIs will be notified of the awards by July 2, 2018.

Submission

Submitted proposals in PDF format to Dominique Bradley, Project Manager, at dust@wisc.edu. Please direct any questions about the proposal to Dominique at dust@wisc.edu or call (608) 265-9483.

Budget Detail:

Salaries & Wages:	
Fringe Benefits:	
Total Salaries & Wages:	
Equipment & Supplies:	
Travel:	
Other Direct Costs:	
Total Budget Request:	

Budget Justification:

Spring 2018 Scoring Rubric- MEP Supported Work

Points Possible	Score Description
Relevance	
1	Relevance of question(s) to both research literature and policy is not explained
2	Connection of research question to research literature established, yet relevance of question to add to district policy or research literature unclear
3	Relevance of question established to either research literature and/or district policy
4	Strong case presented for relevance and utility of research question(s) to research literature and district policy
Methodological Rigor	
1	Methodology poorly articulated, unclear, and/or partially missing
2	Methodology well-articulated but lacks necessary details to fully connect methodological design to research questions
3	Research questions and methodology are clear and reasonably aligned; but there is insufficient support provided for some underlying assumptions connected with research design
4	Methodology is clear and aligned with project goals; supporting assumptions are explicitly addressed
Personnel	
1	No evidence of previous publications in the research topic area and/or professional connection to educational practitioners or policy makers
2	Evidence of prior contributions to either research literature in the topic area through previous publications or professional connection to educational practitioners or policy makers
3	Evidence of both prior publication in the research literature in the topic area and connection to educational practitioners or policy makers
4	Strong evidence of prior publication in the research literature in the topic area and to educational practitioners or policy makers

Project Feasibility	
1	Research design includes both requests for new administrative data collection and survey or qualitative data collection that would impose a significant burden on MMSD personnel, students, or families
2	Research design includes either request for new administrative data collection or survey or qualitative data collection that would impose significant time burdens on MMSD personnel, students, or families
3	Requests for administrative data are reasonable and currently exist within the district and/or would require <i>moderate</i> imposition on MMSD personnel, students, or families through survey or qualitative data collection
4	Data requests are reasonable and/or currently exist within the district's data systems and would require <i>minimal</i> imposition on MMSD personnel, students, or families through survey or qualitative data collection
Qualitative Design	
0	No
1	Yes
TOTAL SCORE	
Total Score	/17 points possible

