



Attendance Matters: Following Up with Riverview Gardens

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By: *Emily Stahly*

A little over a month ago, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [reported](#) that two administrators from Riverview Gardens filed separate lawsuits against the district over pressure to falsify attendance data. Since then, the district received a 70.7 percent score on the 2017 Annual Performance Review (APR), marking the third year in a row it scored over 70 percent—the threshold for full accreditation.

While the State Board of Education [did not upgrade](#) the district this year, it does not seem there will be a full review of Riverview Gardens' records by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The *Post-Dispatch's* latest [article](#) quotes Sarah Potter, DESE spokesperson, who states that DESE “informally reviewed Riverview Gardens' attendance data after hearing of the allegations, but didn't find anything to investigate further.” Based on emails from a records request by the *Post-Dispatch*, the situation seems to merit a more thorough investigation.

Here are some of the findings from the *Post* article:

- The district's overall attendance rate was 78.8 percent on May 30 after the school year ended, but the district submitted an 81.5 percent attendance rate to DESE. (FYI, the attendance rate is the percentage of students who attend school at least 90 percent of the time.)

- Riverview Gardens received 10 out of 10 attendance points on the APR for its 81.5 percent attendance rate. If its attendance rate was actually 78.8 percent, it would have received only 6 out of 10 points and the district would have scored 67.9 percent overall on the APR instead of 70.7 percent.
- Superintendent Scott Spurgeon has denied any wrongdoing and said the district does attendance data clean-ups to ensure the data are accurate. Other Saint Louis area districts, however, say they rarely go back to fix their attendance records but make sure throughout the school year that their records are accurate.

It is possible that the numbers Riverview Gardens submitted to DESE are accurate, and that the district just manages its data differently than other districts. Nevertheless, these emails raise some red flags about its attendance numbers, and they also call into question the accuracy of other records it has submitted to the state.

As I [explained in](#) an earlier post, accurate attendance data matters quite a bit. In addition to affecting how much funding the district receives from the state, these numbers also affect the district's accreditation classification—and consequently, whether students are allowed to transfer to better-performing districts. We must be sure students were not short-changed when Riverview Gardens was upgraded last year from unaccredited to provisionally accredited.

At the very least, shouldn't DESE do a full audit of the district? Putting aside other issues with the accountability system, we must be confident that the numbers are accurate for the system to have a chance at being effective. Otherwise, failing schools will be let off the hook, ultimately hurting the students who live in those districts.

Tags:

- [Riverview Gardens](#)

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Emily Stahly is an analyst at the Show-Me Institute. She earned her B.A. in politics from Hillsdale College in Michigan and is researching education with the Show-Me Institute.

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[2] http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/riverview-gardens-falsified-attendance-reports-administrators-allege-in-lawsuits/article_bf1b487c-0a7c-53e4-9daf-3aeb8435fb55.html?utm_content=buffere92a3&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

[3] <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/ClassificationDec2017.pdf>

[4] http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/riverview-gardens-attendance-rate-improved-percent-after-end-of-year/article_7a482cf7-bf82-5db2-8305-277097f708f0.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=dlvr

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