

MEMORANDUM

January 29, 2016

TO: Education Committee
Public Safety Committee

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst *SJF*

SUBJECT: **Discussion: Habitual Truancy**

Today the Joint Committee will receive an update on various truancy programs and initiatives within the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) system. Representatives from MCPS will be available to brief the Joint Committee. MCPS has provided a PowerPoint presentation for the worksession, attached at ©1-7.

Overview of Habitual Truancy

All children between the ages of five and 16 in Maryland must attend school. A student absent for an unexcused reason is truant. A student with unexcused absences amounting to 20 percent or more of the semester (18 days) or school year (36 days) is habitually truant.

According to a 2015 report by the Maryland Department of Education, habitual truancy rates by County are:

Local Education Agency ¹	Percent
State	1.96
Allegany County	0.60
Anne Arundel County	1.33
Baltimore City	7.41
Baltimore County	2.39
Calvert County	0.61
Caroline County	0.36
Carroll County	0.20
Cecil County	0.90
Charles County	0.39

¹ *Habitual Truants Maryland Public Schools 2014-2015* (Maryland State Department of Education, October 2015)

Dorchester County	0.49
Frederick County	0.57
Garrett County	0.24
Harford County	0.55
Howard County	0.33
Kent County	0.26
Montgomery County	1.35
Prince George's County	2.74
Queen Anne's County	0.17
St. Mary's County	0.20
Somerset County	0.67
Talbot County	0.37
Washington County	1.32
Wicomico County	1.76
Worcester County	0.25

To address habitual truancy, the County has an interagency workgroup, the Truancy Review Board, which addresses both truancy and dropout prevention. Students who are absent approximately 20% of the school year are referred to the Truancy Review Board. This workgroup includes members from MCPS, the State's Attorney's Office, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Police Department, the Housing Opportunities Commission, and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. According to MCPS, each of these agencies has agreed to participate in an overall plan to respond to the habitually truant student. This plan includes school-based and Department of Student Services interventions, a referral process for cases resistant to intervention, an interagency Truancy Review Board, and a system for referral to court. The plan applies to all students between five and 17 years of age. Legal action applies to each person who has legal custody or care and control of the child.

Discussion Issues

1. State data indicate that habitual truancy in Montgomery County has increased slightly over the past three years, from 1.08% in 2012-2013 to 1.35% in 2014-2015. Does current Montgomery County data concur with this trend? If so, what factors may be playing a role in the increase?
2. House Bill 429 (text unavailable at this time) was introduced in the State House of Delegates on January 29, which would create a Task Force to Combat Habitual Truancy. Does MCPS know of any other State-level initiatives or proposals that address habitual truancy?
3. What new initiatives, if any, is MCPS exploring to address habitual truancy, either at the County level or at any specific schools?

Montgomery County Public Schools

Addressing Truancy in Montgomery County

Montgomery County Council

February 1, 2016

Outcomes

- Share data related to habitual truancy and truancy interventions
- Consider root causes of truancy in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)
- Provide an overview of truancy procedures and programs in MCPS

U.S. Department of Education Guidance

U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
U.S. Department of Education

*Every Student, Every Day: A Community Toolkit to
Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*



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United States Department of Education Action Steps

- Generate and act on absenteeism data
- Create and deploy positive messages and measures
- Focus communities on addressing chronic absenteeism
- Ensure responsibility across sectors



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Habitually Truant Data

Percentage of all students habitually truant:

District	Percentage
State Average	1.96
Baltimore City	7.41
Prince Georges County	2.74
Baltimore County	2.39
Montgomery County	1.35
Anne Arundel County	1.33

Factors Impacting Truancy

- Based on formal attendance meetings:
 - Individual student and family circumstances
 - Parent(s) working multiple jobs—limited supervision; no adults home in the morning
 - Focus shifts to needs of young children in the family versus adolescents
 - Language issues—children are more English proficient than their parents and may use this as a way to maintain “power”

Continuum of MCPS Attendance Interventions

- **School-based early intervention:**
 - Telephone calls from teacher and counselor
 - Attendance letters
 - Consult with school nurse if absences are medically related
 - Parent/student conferences

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Continuum of MCPS Attendance Interventions

- **Pupil personnel worker focused intervention:**
 - Attendance plan (contract) with built-in incentives
 - Educational Management Team (EMT) meeting to problem solve around attendance
 - Home visits
 - Referral to partner agencies to provide support around housing, financial, medical, and/or mental health issues

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Continuum of MCPS Attendance Interventions

- External Interventions:
 - Attendance Matters—early intervention problem-solving venue prior to Truancy Review Board
 - Truancy Review Board—multiagency stakeholder problem-solving/truancy enforcement group
 - Referral to State’s Attorney’s Office
 - For secondary students—referral for Alternative II program

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Data Indicate Benefits of Early Intervention

Percentage of cases with improved attendance following the Attendance Matters process by level:

Level	Percentage
Elementary	71
Middle	57
High	54

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Data Indicate Benefits of Early Intervention

Percentage of cases with improved attendance following the Truancy Review Board process by level:

Level	Percentage
Elementary	80
Middle	61
High	45



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Building Student Relationships and Increasing Engagement

- Mentor programs
- School counselor groups
- Restorative practices circles



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Community Partnerships

- MCPS and community partners collaborate to address chronic absenteeism in high school students
 - MCPS high school principals
 - MCPS Division of Pupil Personnel Services
 - MCPS General Counsel
 - Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office
- Sharing longitudinal attendance data with elementary school students to emphasize the long-term implications of early attendance issues



Questions?

