

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2016 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader - Revised**

House Bill 429  
Ways and Means

(Delegate Patterson, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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**Task Force to Combat Habitual Student Truancy**

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This bill establishes the Task Force to Combat Habitual Student Truancy. The task force member representing Morgan State University must chair the task force, which is to be staffed by Morgan State University. By July 1, 2017, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016, and terminates June 30, 2018.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for Morgan State University are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** The task force is required to:

- study and assess how the structure and effectiveness of the State's existing truancy courts can be improved;
- study the State's chronic absentee rates and assess whether chronic student absenteeism influences truancy rates;

- identify best practices regarding how records relating to student absences are gathered and maintained and the proper time a pupil personnel worker should be notified of a student's chronic absenteeism or habitual truancy;
- determine methods of encouraging State agencies to work collaboratively to reduce habitual student truancy;
- determine whether specified actions would be helpful in combatting habitual student truancy, including requiring each local school system to provide evening high school programs; and
- make recommendations on how best to combat habitual student truancy in the State.

A member of the task force may not receive compensation but is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

**Current Law/Background:** A truant student is a student who is unlawfully absent from school for more than 8 days in any quarter, 15 days in any semester, or 20 days in a school year. A student is considered lawfully absent from school for a death in the immediate family, illness, a court summons, hazardous weather conditions, approved work, observance of a religious holiday, a State emergency, suspension, lack of authorized transportation, or another emergency or set of circumstances that is determined to be a good and sufficient cause for absence. An absence for any other reason, including absence for any portion of the day, is considered unlawful. Local school systems may add criteria for unlawful absences.

Each local board of education must develop a system of active intervention for truant students. Each truant student attending kindergarten through grade 12 must immediately be referred to the local board's system of active intervention. Local boards are not prohibited from intervening in the case of a student who is frequently absent from school for both lawful and unlawful purposes but is not a truant student.

Local school systems keep records on *habitually* truant students and forward the data to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for compilation and reporting. A student must be age 5 through 20 and be *unlawfully* absent for 20% or more of the school days within any marking period, semester, or year during the last school year to be labeled a habitual truant (*e.g.*, 36 days in a school year). According to MSDE, in the 2014-2015 school year, the State percentage of habitually truant students was 1.96% (based on an aggregation of local education agency counts). Habitual truancy rates for 17 of the 24 school systems were less than 1%; in Baltimore City, 7.41% of students were habitually truant. This data includes students, up through age 20, who are not required by law to

attend school; this may, in part, explain the high rate in Baltimore City. Typically a greater percentage of high school students than elementary school students are habitually truant. Chapter 494 of 2012 increased the compulsory age of school attendance from under age 16 to under age 17 beginning in the 2015-2016 school year and to under age 18 beginning in the 2017-2018 school year.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 17, 2016  
md/rhh Revised - House Third Reader - April 8, 2016

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