

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 798
Ways and Means

(Delegate Glenn)

Baltimore City - Truant Students - Active Intervention

This bill requires the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners to develop an Individualized Reengagement Plan as part of the current system of active intervention for a truant student who is at least 16 years old or who is not accumulating sufficient credits to reasonably complete a high school diploma before the age of 21. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can provide technical assistance to the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) using existing resources.

Local Effect: BCPS expenditures increase by a minimum of \$32.3 million annually to provide each specified truant student with an Individualized Reengagement Plan that meets the requirements of the bill. Revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: An Individualized Reengagement Plan is a document that contains an individualized plan of action to reengage a truant student who was previously disengaged socially and academically. The Individualized Reengagement Plan must be developed by a group of professionals employed by the board such as teachers, guidance counselors, family services coordinators, psychologists, and social workers. The plans must also be customized to assist in the student's reengagement process, including (1) measurable goals

and objectives for the student; (2) strategies for teachers, parents, and the student; (3) a list of any special accommodations, resources, and services for the student; and (4) a process for review of the plan after a trial period of four to six weeks.

In addition, the board must create a database in Baltimore City that will be used to identify and track each specified truant student, including academic and support services provided, progress toward high school graduation or GED, and other relevant student outcomes. The active intervention system must include coordination and collaboration with State and municipal agencies to deliver services to specified truant students. Each public school under the board's jurisdiction is required to prepare a school-specific plan to reengage specified truant students.

Current Law: 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.

A child older than age 5 and younger than age 18 must attend public school regularly unless the child is otherwise receiving regular, thorough instruction at an alternative setting (*i.e.*, a private or home school). An individual who has legal custody of a child older than age 5 and younger than age 16 and fails to see that the child attends school is guilty of a misdemeanor.

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, pregnancy or parenthood, 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.

Background: Local school systems keep records on *habitually* truant students and forward the data to 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 student (*e.g.*, 36 days in a school year). In the 2017-2018 school year, 15.63% of students in Baltimore City were habitually truant. Statewide, 3.37% of students are 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.

Local Expenditures: BCPS expenditures increase significantly to provide each specified truant student with an Individualized Reengagement Plan that meets the requirements of the bill, to upgrade its database to track truant students, and to prepare school-specific plans to reengage specified truant students.

BCPS estimates that it will need to hire 172 additional school-based staff (social workers) and three administrative staff to be located at headquarters at an estimated annual cost of at least \$32.3 million to have more intensive intervention, tracking, and follow up with identified truant students.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Juvenile Services; Baltimore City Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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