

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1486
Ways and Means

(Delegate Gutierrez, *et al.*)

Public Schools - Student Attendance - Preventing Chronic Absenteeism

This bill requires that each school maintain a record of the daily attendance of each student enrolled in the school using the unique student identifier number assigned by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). A school is also required to calculate and maintain a record of the number of students who are either chronically absent or have high attendance, disaggregated by specified subgroups, and to submit a report on this information to the local board of education each grading period.

Each local board must calculate and maintain a record of the number of students who are either chronically absent or have a high attendance based on the reports disaggregated by specified subgroups. A local board must report this information to the State Board of Education at least once a year. In addition, each local board must develop and implement an attendance incentive action plan.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2010.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The State board can collect reports from the local school systems and provide technical assistance to local school systems using existing resources.

Local Effect: Local school system expenditures increase minimally to create the required reports. Any fiscal impact due to changes to local school systems' attendance monitoring policies are anticipated to be minimal.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The purpose of the incentive action plan that each local board of education must develop is to encourage students with chronic absenteeism to attend school regularly and to inform students with chronic absenteeism, and the parents or guardian of those students, of the legal attendance requirements and long-term consequences of chronic school absenteeism, as well as the academic and social benefits of regular school attendance.

The attendance incentive action plan must include:

- chronic absenteeism prevention strategies;
- early intervention strategies;
- positive attendance campaigns;
- parental outreach; and
- student attendance incentives.

Current Law: A child age 5 to 15 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 age 5 to 15 and fails to see that the child attends school is guilty of a misdemeanor.

Regulations specify that a record of the daily attendance of each student must be kept in accordance with the Maryland Student Records System Manual (2007). Local school systems are required to develop a student attendance policy that includes penalties for not meeting attendance standards and actions that will be taken by school system staff when a student is unlawfully absent. The attendance monitoring procedure must include intervention strategies and procedures for dealing with absenteeism at the beginning stages of the problem as well as chronic absenteeism. Students that are chronically absent must be referred to pupil services or other central office professionals for case management.

Background: School attendance rates are lower for high school students than for elementary or middle school students. **Exhibit 1** displays the average daily attendance rate for high schools and the percentage of high school students who were absent from school more than 20 days during the school year for each of the 24 local school systems in the 2008-2009 school year. The exhibit shows that the six jurisdictions with the lowest average daily attendance rate (Baltimore City, and Baltimore, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, and Prince George's counties) also have the highest percentage of students who are chronically absent.

Exhibit 1
High School Average Daily Attendance Rate and Percentage of
High School Students Absent from School More than 20 Days by School System
2008-2009 School Year

<u>Local School System</u>	<u>Average Daily Attendance Rate</u>	<u>Local School System</u>	<u>Percent of Students Absent More than 20 Days</u>
Baltimore City	83.5%	Baltimore City	42.0%
Dorchester	89.3%	Dorchester	34.9%
Cecil	90.9%	Kent	27.5%
Kent	90.9%	Cecil	27.1%
Prince George's	91.4%	Prince George's	26.8%
Baltimore	92.2%	Baltimore	20.3%
Caroline	92.4%	Harford	18.9%
Queen Anne's	92.5%	Caroline	17.9%
Harford	92.8%	Queen Anne's	17.8%
Somerset	92.8%	Worcester	17.2%
Wicomico	92.8%	Charles	15.4%
Allegany	93.0%	Frederick	15.2%
Worcester	93.0%	Wicomico	15.0%
Frederick	93.3%	Anne Arundel	14.6%
Anne Arundel	93.4%	Allegany	13.9%
Garrett	93.6%	St. Mary's	13.9%
Charles	93.7%	Somerset	13.8%
Talbot	93.8%	Talbot	12.7%
St. Mary's	93.9%	Washington	10.6%
Calvert	94.4%	Carroll	10.0%
Washington	94.5%	Montgomery	9.0%
Carroll	94.9%	Garrett	8.8%
Howard	95.2%	Howard	7.9%
Montgomery	95.5%	Calvert	5.2%
All Public Schools	92.4%	All Public Schools	18.4%

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Poor attendance is one of the key warning signs that a student is going to drop out of high school. One study of Chicago public schools found that missing 20% of the school days

in ninth grade is a better predictor of whether a student is going to drop out than eighth grade test scores.

Local Expenditures: Local school system expenditures increase minimally to produce the required attendance reports. Harford County reports that the attendance reports can be produced without any major changes to its database system; it is assumed that the other local jurisdictions can also produce the reports without any major changes. MSDE reports that, if necessary, its Pupil Services and Alternative Programs Branch can provide technical assistance to local school systems with existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Juvenile Services, Allegany and Harford counties, Consortium on Chicago School Research, Department of Legislative Services

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