

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 869
Ways and Means

(Delegate Cullison, *et al.*)

Task Force to Study Chronic Absenteeism in Maryland's Public Schools

This bill establishes a Task Force to Study Chronic Absenteeism in Maryland's Public Schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide staff support for the task force. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by December 1, 2014.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014, and terminates June 30, 2015.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can staff the task force and reimburse expenses with existing resources; however, due to limited staff resources within the relevant unit in MSDE resources may need to be redirected from other projects.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force must collect and analyze data relating to chronic absenteeism, including: (1) where and in what grades chronic absenteeism is most prevalent; (2) the prevalence and effect of chronic absenteeism in prekindergarten and kindergarten; and (3) the relationship between chronic absenteeism in secondary grades and course completion and graduation. The task force must also evaluate local and national strategies and best practices to address chronic absenteeism, and identify differentiated and comprehensive responses for chronic absenteeism that rely first on prevention and intervention.

The task force must make recommendations that recognize the role of the community, public agencies, public schools systems, public schools, parents, and students in solving the problem of chronic absenteeism; and include ways in which (1) data collection and reporting of chronic absenteeism can be improved; and (2) chronic absenteeism can be prevented and eliminated.

Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

Current Law/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 (*e.g.*, 36 days in a school year). By some definitions habitually truancy and chronic absenteeism are the same, other definitions define the two terms differently with chronic absenteeism including students with excused absences.

Exhibit 1 shows the percent of students who were habitually truant for each local school system in the 2012-2013 school year. Habitual truancy rates for 16 of the 24 school systems were less than 1%; in Baltimore City 7.52% 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.

Since 2007, MSDE has produced the following four reports related to chronic absenteeism:

- *Task Force: Attending to Learn-The Implications of Raising the Compulsory Age for School Attendance (December 1, 2007);*
- *Task Force to Study Multiple Suspensions: The Use of Student Support Teams and Other Intervention in the Reduction of Multiple Suspensions (December 31, 2008);*
- *Report to the Maryland State Board of Education on the Provision of Educational Services to Long-Term Suspended and Expelled Students in Maryland Public Schools (August 2010); and*
- *Dropout Prevention/School Completion Intervention/Resource Guide (March 2013).*

Exhibit 1
Percent of Students Habitually Truant
2012-2013 School Year

| <u>Local School System</u> | <u>Habitually Truant</u> | <u>Local School System</u> | <u>Habitually Truant</u> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Allegany | 1.18% | Harford | 0.67% |
| Anne Arundel | 1.10% | Howard | 0.31% |
| Baltimore City | 7.52% | Kent | 1.25% |
| Baltimore | 1.42% | Montgomery | 1.08% |
| Calvert | 0.41% | Prince George's | 2.93% |
| Caroline | 0.39% | Queen Anne's | 0.19% |
| Carroll | 0.19% | St. Mary's | 0.49% |
| Cecil | 0.84% | Somerset | 0.63% |
| Charles | 0.11% | Talbot | 0.47% |
| Dorchester | 1.29% | Washington | 0.89% |
| Frederick | 0.64% | Wicomico | 0.94% |
| Garrett | 0.00% | Worcester | 0.19% |

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 715 (Senator Ferguson, *et al.*) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 24, 2014
mc/rhh

Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510