

Chapter 243

(House Bill 879)

AN ACT concerning

Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools

FOR the purpose of establishing the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools for the purpose of studying and making recommendations on practices to identify, prevent, and eliminate chronic absenteeism by students from schools in the State; and generally relating to the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That:

(a) There is a Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools.

(b) The Task Force consists of the following members:

(1) one member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;

(2) one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

(3) the following members, appointed by the State Superintendent of Schools:

(i) one county superintendent of schools;

(ii) one representative of the Governor's Office;

(iii) one school-based administrator;

(iv) one public school teacher;

(v) one school counselor;

(vi) one parent of a student enrolled in a public school;

(vii) one pupil personnel worker;

(viii) one public school student;

~~(viii)~~ (ix) one representative of a teacher's union;

~~(ix)~~ (x) one representative of an institution of higher education;

~~(x)~~ (xi) one representative of a nationally recognized educational organization with expertise in student attendance or chronic absenteeism;

(xii) one school-based licensed clinical social worker, registered nurse, or other school-based public health professional; and

~~(xi)~~ (xiii) any other individuals with expertise the State Superintendent determines is relevant to the work of the Task Force.

(c) The Task Force shall elect a chair and vice chair from among its members.

(d) The State Department of Education shall provide staff for the Task Force.

(e) A member of the Task Force:

(1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Task Force; but

(2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

(f) The Task Force shall:

(1) ~~collect and~~ analyze data regarding chronic absenteeism by students from schools in the State, including research, student attendance collection practices, and trends in statewide and local student attendance;

(2) identify and evaluate local and national strategies and best practices to address chronic absenteeism;

(3) identify differentiated and comprehensive responses for chronic absenteeism that prioritize prevention and intervention;

(4) set a statewide goal for the reduction in chronic absenteeism throughout the State;

(5) develop and distribute guidance on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism to local school systems;

(6) develop and distribute a toolkit on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism for school leaders in each grade band (elementary, middle, and high school) that includes culturally responsive and nonpunitive strategies for reducing student absences; ~~and~~

(7) establish categories that identify reasons for chronic absenteeism by students from schools in the State, and collect data for each corresponding category for each local school system; and

(8) make recommendations on:

(i) a single definition of chronic absenteeism;

(ii) the role that the community, public agencies, public school systems and schools, parents, and students have in solving the problem of chronic absenteeism;

(iii) the best practices for data collection relating to student chronic absenteeism and tracking student attendance; and

(iv) the most effective practices to prevent and eliminate chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and nonpunitive.

(g) On or before December 31, 2025, the Task Force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That:

(a) On or before December 31, 2025, the State Department of Education shall update regulations on student attendance to:

(1) incorporate the most effective practices identified by the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools established under Section 1 of this Act; and

(2) adopt regulations that include common definitions for chronic absence, chronic absenteeism, and day of attendance.

(b) On or before June 30, 2026, the Department shall distribute the following developed by the Task Force:

(1) the toolkit on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism for school leaders; and

(2) to each local school system in the State, guidance on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism that:

(i) defines chronic absenteeism;

(ii) identifies and analyzes trends in data on attendance and chronic absenteeism at the State and local level;

(iii) includes an analysis of how student attendance is collected in local school systems across the State; and

(iv) describes the most effective practices for identifying, preventing, and eliminating chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and nonpunitive.

SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2025. It shall remain effective for a period of 1 year and 6 months and, at the end of December 31, 2026, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

Approved by the Governor, May 6, 2025.