

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 523
Ways and Means

(Delegate Taveras, *et al.*)

County Boards of Education - Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and
Expulsion - Investigation and Reporting

This bill requires each local board of education to investigate and identify root causes of chronic absenteeism and expulsion in the local school system. The investigation must examine a student’s domestic situation, family vacations, history of alcohol or drug addiction, mental health, physical health, and school environment. The investigation must also examine whether the student is providing care for someone in the student’s household or providing language translation for a member of the student’s household who is sick. Beginning January 1, 2026, and each quarter thereafter for a period of 10 years, each local board of education must report their findings to the applicable county delegation of the General Assembly, the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, and the House Ways and Means Committee. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Local school system expenditures may increase to collect and report the required data on student absenteeism and expulsions. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Apart from specified exceptions, any child between the ages of 5 and 17 must attend a public school regularly during the entire school year, and each person with

legal custody of a child older than age 4 and younger than age 16 must ensure the child attends school or receives instruction as required.

Required Reporting of Student Absences

The principal or head teacher of each public or private school in the State must report the name of each child enrolled in a school who has been absent or irregular in attendance, without lawful excuse, or who shows maladjustment to the county superintendent, the supervisor of pupil personnel, or any other official designated by the county superintendent so that the causes may be studied and solutions worked out.

On receipt of a report from the principal or head teacher that a student has been habitually truant without lawful excuse, the appropriate representative of the local school system (1) must initiate an investigation into the causes of the child's truancy and (2) may provide counseling regarding the availability of social, health, and educational services. Following the investigation or intervention, the local school system may notify the Department of Juvenile Services that the student has been habitually truant. The county superintendent, the superintendent's designee, or the supervisor of pupil personnel must provide to the local education agency information regarding the number of students identified as being habitually truant.

Local Expenditures: Local school systems may incur additional costs to collect data and investigate individual cases of chronic absenteeism and expulsion. However, any such costs are mitigated to the extent that local school systems already have mechanisms in place to monitor and report on cases of student absenteeism and expulsion as required under current law.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and local school systems have made student attendance a priority. The State Superintendent of Schools has created a Student Attendance Task Force to examine data, identify best practices, and develop guidance to local school systems. MSDE indicates that each local school system is equipped with student support staff including school counselors, social workers, pupil personnel workers, school health services coordinators, and school psychologists that routinely work with students and their families on a wide range of issues that may lead to absences from school.

In January 2025, the State Superintendent of Schools provided [information](#) to both the State Board of Education and the Accountability and Implementation Board on the extent of chronic absenteeism among local school systems. Several key findings include the following:

- Chronic absences among students have gradually declined since 2022 but have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

- Chronic absences at the high school level have seen less reductions since 2022 than at the elementary and middle school levels.
- Chronic absence rates (2023-2024 school year) were highest for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students and students in special service groups.
- Chronic absence rates varied significantly among local school systems with the rates exceeding 35% in Baltimore City, Allegany, and Dorchester counties; while the rates were below 20% in Calvert, Frederick, and Howard counties.

In addition, each year, MSDE releases a [report](#) with data on the number of suspension and expulsion incidents in each local school system during the preceding school year. For the 2023-2024 school year, there were 401 incidents of attendance-related suspensions, all of which must have been in-school suspensions as Chapters 230 and 231 of 2009 prohibit a student from being suspended or expelled from school solely for attendance-related offences.

Potential Fiscal Impact on Local School Systems

The need for further resources to implement the bill's reporting requirements may depend on the extent of chronic absenteeism within the local school system. Larger local school systems with higher rates of chronic absenteeism, such as Baltimore City and Prince George's County, may require additional resources to conduct the individualized student investigations. Additional resources may also be required in several smaller local school systems, such as Allegany, Dorchester, and Somerset counties.

In response to a request for information on the potential impact of this legislation, Baltimore City, which had the highest chronic absenteeism rate in the 2023-24 academic year at 48.7%, indicated that it already closely monitors student absenteeism and can handle the additional reporting requirements with existing resources. In contrast, Prince George's County, which has a chronic absenteeism rate of 32.7%, advises that the local school system will need 66 additional positions at an annual cost of \$5 million to handle the new reporting requirements, which encompass a more in-depth review of the underlying causes behind chronic student absences. The additional positions reflect one new staff member at each of the county's middle and high schools.

Additionally, two larger counties (Anne Arundel and Montgomery) indicate that they can implement the bill's reporting requirements with existing resources, while St. Mary's County and Baltimore County anticipate needing a limited number of additional staff.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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