

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 879
Ways and Means

(Delegate Smith, *et al.*)

Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools

This bill establishes the Task Force to Improve Attendance and Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide staff support. Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to expense reimbursement under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget. By December 31, 2025, the task force must submit a report detailing its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly, and MSDE must update regulations relating to student attendance to incorporate the task force’s recommendations. By June 30, 2026, MSDE must distribute a toolkit for school leaders on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism and provide guidance to each local school system on effective prevention strategies. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025, and terminates December 31, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can staff the task force and update regulations with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local school operations may be affected to the extent that any new regulations established by MSDE impose additional requirements. Local school finances are not expected to be materially affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force must (1) collect and analyze data regarding chronic absenteeism by students from schools in the State; (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; and (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. Furthermore, the task force must make recommendations on (1) a single definition of chronic absenteeism; (2) the role that the community, public agencies, public school systems and schools, parents, and students have in solving the problem of chronic absenteeism; (3) the best practices for data collection relating to chronic absenteeism and tracking student attendance; and (4) the most effective practices to prevent and eliminate chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and nonpunitive.

On or before December 31, 2025, MSDE must update regulations on student attendance to incorporate the most effective practices identified by the task force and include common definitions for chronic absence, chronic absenteeism, and day of attendance.

On or before June 30, 2026, MSDE must distribute the toolkit (developed by the task force) on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism for school leaders. MSDE must also distribute (to each local school system) guidance on identifying and preventing chronic absenteeism that (1) defines chronic absenteeism; (2) identifies and analyzes trends in data on attendance and chronic absenteeism at the State and local level; (3) includes an analysis of how student attendance is collected in local school systems across the State; and (4) describes the most effective practices for identifying, preventing, and eliminating chronic absenteeism that are culturally responsive and nonpunitive.

Current Law: 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.

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; Department of Legislative Services

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js/hlb

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