

TO: House Committee on Ways and Means

BILL: HB0523- County Boards of Education - Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion
- Investigation and Reporting

Date: February 12, 2025

Position: Information

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully provides information regarding **HB 523 – Chronic Absenteeism and Expulsion.**

HB 523 Summary

HB 523 mandates that county boards of education investigate the root causes of chronic absenteeism and expulsion among students. These investigations must consider factors like a student's home life, health, and school environment. The bill requires quarterly reports to state committees for ten years, starting January 1, 2026, outlining their findings.

Information

HB 523 specifies that each Local Education Agency (LEA) will examine a student's domestic situation, family vacations, family history of drug or alcohol addiction, mental and physical health, school environment, and whether the student is providing care or translation service for a member of their family. Information on all of these items may not be available or the family may withhold information for privacy reasons.

MSDE has made student attendance a priority. The State Superintendent has created a Student Attendance Task Force to examine data, identify best practices, and develop guidance for Local Education Agencies (LEA)s. The Department is also partnering with [Attendance Works](#) to assist with the development of attendance guidance, assist with facilitation of the Task Force, create a communication plan, and develop tool kits that LEAs can use to implement strategies and best practices to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism.

The Task Force consists of professionals representing various sectors within education, mental health, and community services. This diverse team brings a wealth of perspectives and expertise with a multifaceted approach to tackling chronic absences and improving student outcomes. The Task Force's charge is to identify and share successful strategies for reducing chronic absences, create a comprehensive attendance guidance document that will provide actionable strategies for schools at all levels, and offer resources for both students and schools from early intervention to intensive supports, to address the root causes of absences.

In its membership, the Task Force has a representative of the Baltimore Teachers Union, the Maryland State Education Association, a representative from Parent's Place of Maryland, a behavioral health coordinator, community school coordinator, director of student services, school counselor, pupil personnel worker, a Free State parent representative, a representative of higher education, an LEA Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, two local superintendents, elementary and secondary school principals, and MSDE staff.

In addition to activities related to the Task Force and its partnership with Attendance Works, MSDE has been engaged in providing chronic absences support to improve student outcomes through:

- researching trends in statewide and local data on attendance and school climate;

- reviewing school data to identify schools that have lowered chronic absences and improved attendance and determining strategies that have contributed to their success;
- identifying and addressing how school climate may impact attendance (example: impact of bullying behaviors, what contributes to school avoidance);
- utilizing the Maryland School Mental Health Response Team to provide support to school counselors and student services personnel to address challenges with attendance; and
- identifying strategies that community schools are using to reduce chronic absences.

Through these comprehensive efforts, the Task Force and MSDE, in partnership with Attendance Works, aim to create a supportive and effective framework for improving student attendance across Maryland.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 523**. Please contact Akilah Alleyne, Ph.D., Executive Director of Government Affairs, (akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov) for any additional information.