

Baltimore City Council Bill 25-0002 Study and Report – Absences in Baltimore City Schools

Education, Youth, and Older Adults Committee
 March 4, 2025

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) **supports with amendments** Council Bill 25-0002, which seeks to ensure City Schools prepare a report exploring the causes of student absences to better identify solutions to address the most persistent barriers students face to attending school. It is the hope of the City Council that in producing such a report, policy recommendations may be developed for agencies to adopt and implement in an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism.

City Schools concurs with the Council’s attention to this important matter, and has long recognized the interplay between student attendance and long-term academic success. Thanks to a yearlong focus on attendance, City Schools’ year-to-year districtwide attendance last year increased by 1.8 percentage points over the previous year, meaning more than 30,000 students improved their attendance. Also encouraging, the number of chronically absent City Schools students decreased by 5.4 percentage points last year, while every other large Maryland school district experienced an increase.

City Schools’ chronic absenteeism rate is falling while other large Maryland districts experience increases

LEA	% Difference 2022 to 2023	Difference by students 2022 to 2023
City Schools	- 4.0 %	- 4,021 students
Baltimore Co.	+ 1.5 %	+ 1,405 students
Mont. Co.	+ 2.1 %	+ 3,565 students
Prince George’s	+ 3.3 %	+ 4,479 students
Anne Arundel	+ 1.1 %	+ 1,094 students

Source: Maryland Report Card -
<https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov>

The district's improvements can be attributed to several factors, most notably our work to reduce chronic absenteeism through research-based strategies for school attendance teams. Highlights of these strategies include:

- Establishing an attendance team that meets weekly to review and take action on data and keeps school's School Family and Community Council apprised of challenges and next steps.
- Creating and putting in motion a plan to call all families of students who are not at school by a designated time in the morning and/or throughout the school day.
- Identifying and aligning resources that address the most common attendance concerns within the school and address root causes of individual student's absenteeism.
- Developing incentives at the school, grade, classroom and/or student level to encourage and celebrate strong and most improved attendance.
- Implementing a system of matching students who are chronically absent with resources and supports (i.e., check-in/check-out, a mentor) that can be monitored for effectiveness of improving outcomes.
- Engaging families through back-to-school celebrations and other events throughout the year.

In addition to the efforts outlined above, City Schools' creation of an onsite support model to 96 schools has also contributed to improvements in chronic absenteeism. The onsite support model includes three teams from the district's Attendance Team that go into schools to provide in-person support on chronic absenteeism, as well as barriers to attendance and truancy related issues and concerns. Each support team works collaboratively with schools on case management, attendance strategy, data, and other incentive programs in order to improve outcomes.

Among other efforts to combat chronic absenteeism is Baltimore's citywide initiative between City Schools and the Mayor's Office to emphasize the critical importance of daily school attendance. At the end of each quarter, Mayor Brandon Scott presents a trophy to the school that shows the greatest reduction in chronic absenteeism. The attendance campaign is continuing throughout the 2024-25 school year.

While these examples of critical district progress demonstrate City Schools' ongoing commitment to prioritizing attendance while seeking to reduce chronic absenteeism, the fact remains that any effort to further examine the root causes of student absence and subsequent opportunities for improvement is welcome.

City Schools supports Council Bill 25-0002 with amendments that are largely technical in nature and have been submitted prior to today's hearing through the bill's sponsor, Councilman Mark Conway. As noted in our amendments, City Schools looks forward to the City Council securing funding for this study so that we can get it underway. We appreciate the committee's consideration and respectfully urge a favorable with amendments report of Council Bill 25-0002.