



# STUDENT ATTENDANCE FACT SHEET

*In order to get the most from school, students must be in school, because students who are frequently absent miss out on important academic and social learning opportunities. Suspension, expulsion, truancy, and even excused absences due to illness and other factors reduce the time that students spend in the classroom. Increasing school attendance is a critical step toward ensuring educational achievement for all students. OSI-Baltimore supports school- and community-wide responses to student attendance problems that identify and ameliorate root causes at the individual and systemic level.*

## HOW DO SCHOOLS CLASSIFY ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY?

- When a student misses school, the absence is classified as either an **excused** absence or an **unexcused** absence.
- An absence may be excused for student illness, death in the immediate family, court summons, religious observance, school authorized work or activity, hazardous weather conditions, state emergency, lack of authorized transportation, and suspension. Any other absence is considered unexcused.
- Although there is no national definition of truancy, each state is required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act to define truancy and to collect data on truancy rates. In Maryland, a student is considered an **habitual truant** if he or she was age 5 through 20 during the school year, enrolled in a school for 91 or more days, and unlawfully absent for 20% or more of the days enrolled.<sup>i</sup>
- In Maryland, schools must also track the percent of **chronically absent** students who have missed 20 or more days of school, regardless of whether the absences are excused or unexcused.

## WHY DO STUDENTS MISS SCHOOL?

- Reasons for school absence vary with age, gender, and other factors, but can include personal illness, work responsibilities, caring for children or sick relatives, fear of bullying, school disengagement and push-out, involvement with drugs or criminal activity, lack of stable housing, and lack of transportation.
- About 50% of truant 9<sup>th</sup>-graders report discretionary reasons for truancy (such as oversleeping, wanting to hang out with friends, etc.), 25% report being pushed out or bullied, and the remaining 25% cite external pull-out factors such as work or family obligations.<sup>ii</sup>

## WHO IS TRUANT OR CHRONICALLY ABSENT?

- Male and female students are equally likely to be truant, although their reasons for truancy often differ.<sup>iii</sup>
- Children are more likely to be chronically absent when they live in poverty, face multiple family risks (e.g. their mother is a single parent, has limited education, is in poor health, depends upon welfare, and has three or more children), and experience domestic and/or community violence.<sup>iv</sup>
- Students who participate in religious services, are enrolled in college preparatory courses, have strong academic achievement, feel safe at school, have supervision after school, and avoid drug use are less likely to be truant.<sup>v</sup>

## SCHOOL ABSENCES PREDICT DROP OUT

- When students miss school, they often fall behind academically, sometimes permanently. **Students who attended school less than 70% of the time in 9<sup>th</sup> grade had at least a 75% chance of dropping out.**<sup>vi</sup>
- The earlier a student begins to have attendance problems, the greater the risk that he or she will drop out of school. For instance, chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Among children living in poverty, it also predicts poor attendance and achievement in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Students with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade attendance rate below 90% had on-time graduation rates of 18-26%, and students with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade attendance rate below 80% had on-time graduation rates of only 5-13%. By contrast, **students with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade attendance rate of at least 95% had more than double the on-time graduation rate of students with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade attendance rate below 90%.**<sup>vii</sup>

## SCHOOL ABSENCES OFTEN PRECIPITATE CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

- Truant youth are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. A study of Colorado youth found that over **90% of youth in juvenile detention have a history of truancy.**<sup>viii</sup>
- Individuals with a history of truancy are also more likely to face negative adult outcomes, including marital instability, job instability, criminal activity, and incarceration.<sup>ix</sup>



# STUDENT ATTENDANCE FACT SHEET MARYLAND AND BALTIMORE CITY, 2006-2007

## HABITUAL TRUANCY RATES IN MARYLAND AND BALTIMORE CITY

- In the 2006-2007 school year, **2.21%** of Maryland public school students – **about 18,800 youth** – were habitually truant.<sup>x</sup>
- During that same period, **9.17%** of Baltimore City public school students – **about 7,550 youth** – were habitually truant, more than double the truancy rate of the second-highest county and more than quadruple the state-wide truancy rate.<sup>xi</sup>

## ATTENDANCE RATE OBSCURES HIGH TRUANCY AND CHRONIC ABSENCE

- In the 2006-2007 school year, the average attendance rate in Baltimore was **94.1%** for elementary schools, **88.3%** for middle schools, and **82.7%** for high schools. But, these averages can hide much lower attendance rates in certain schools and for certain populations. For instance, special education students in Baltimore high schools had an attendance rate of **74.9%**.
- In Maryland during the 2006-2007 school year, **6.1%** of elementary school students, **12.4%** of middle school students, and **19.5%** of high school students **missed more than 20 school days**.<sup>xii</sup> The rates were even higher in Baltimore; **14.0%** of elementary school students, **33.7%** of middle school students, and **43.5%** of high school students **missed more than 20 school days**.<sup>xiii</sup>

## SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AND STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY ABSENT AT HIGHER RATES

- During the 2006-2007 school year, students eligible for free and reduced price meals were more likely to be chronically absent state-wide and in Baltimore for all grade levels – except among Baltimore high school students, where students eligible for free and reduced price meals were about equally likely to be chronically absent as their peers (43.2 percent of students eligible for free/reduced meals versus 43.8 percent of ineligible students).<sup>xiv</sup>
- Both state-wide and in Baltimore, and at all grade levels, special education students were more likely to be chronically absent than their peers.<sup>xv</sup>
- State-wide, rates of chronic absence were nearly equal for males and females, although in Baltimore, males were slightly more likely to be chronically absent than females (41.7 percent of high school females versus 45.5 percent of high school males were considered chronically absent in BCPSS).
- Data show that during the 2006-2007 school year, students with limited English proficiency were less likely at all grade levels to be chronically absent, both in Baltimore and in Maryland overall.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Accountability and Assessment. Habitual Truants, Maryland Public Schools, 2006-2007. Accessed at <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/BF1EED33-A890-434D-BFDD-07EA226A6F93/14908/habtru08.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Center for Social Organization of Schools. (2000). Survey of reasons 9<sup>th</sup> graders report for not attending school in an urban, high poverty city.

<sup>iii</sup> Finlay, K.A. (2005). Gender differences among truant youth. Denver, CO: National Center for School Engagement.

<sup>iv</sup> Romero, M. and Lee, Y. (2007) A national portrait of chronic absenteeism in the early grades. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vi</sup> Neild, R.C., Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system. *Educational Leadership*. 65 (3). 28-33.

<sup>vii</sup> Balfanz, R., & Boccanfuso, C. (2007). Falling off the path to graduation: Early indicators research brief. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools.

<sup>viii</sup> Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. (2002). Youth out of school: Linking absence to delinquency. Denver, CO: Author.

<sup>ix</sup> Henry, supra note iv.

<sup>x</sup> MSDE, supra note i.

<sup>xi</sup> MSDE, supra note i.

<sup>xii</sup> 2007 Maryland Report Card: Maryland State Demographics. Accessed at <http://www.mdreportcard.org/Demographics.aspx?WDATA=State&K=99AAAA#attendance>.

<sup>xiii</sup> 2007 Maryland Report Card: Baltimore City Demographics. Accessed at <http://www.mdreportcard.org/Demographics.aspx?K=30AAAA&WDATA=local+school+system#attendance>

<sup>xiv</sup> 2007 Maryland Report Card.

<sup>xv</sup> 2007 Maryland Report Card.

<sup>xvi</sup> 2007 Maryland Report Card.