

# STUDENT ATTENDANCE FACT SHEET

## MARYLAND AND BALTIMORE CITY, 2009-2010

**REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IS VITAL** to children's academic and social development. All absences, whether they are due to suspension, expulsion, truancy, illness or other excused reasons, reduce the time that students spend in the classroom learning. In some of Maryland's schools, rates of chronic absence are at epidemic levels. Increasing school attendance, particularly in low achieving schools, is a critical first step to raising achievement levels for all students. OSI-Baltimore supports school- and community-wide efforts to remove barriers to regular school attendance and develop schools that are engaging and welcoming to all students.

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### 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 a habitual truant if he or she was age 5 through 20 during the school year, enrolled in a school for more than 90 days, and unlawfully absent for 20% or more of the days enrolled.<sup>i</sup>
- Maryland schools collect and report attendance data in more detail than virtually any other state, tracking **average daily attendance rates**, **chronic absence rates** (percentages of students who have missed 20 or more days in one year), **high attendance rates** (percentages of students who have missed 5 or fewer days) and **habitual truancy rates**.

### 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 9th-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 are less likely to be truant if they are enrolled in college preparatory courses, have strong academic achievement, feel safe at school, have supervision after school, participate in religious services, and avoid drug use.<sup>v</sup>

### STUDENT ABSENCES PREDICT SCHOOL FAILURE AND DROP OUT

- The earlier a student begins to have attendance problems, the greater the impact on achievement. For instance, chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in 1st grade. Among children living in poverty, chronic absence also predicts poor attendance and achievement in 5th grade.
- When many students in a class or school have poor attendance, the performance of all students suffers. This is because teachers must slow the curriculum to catch-up missing students.
- Students with a 6th grade attendance rate below 90% had on-time graduation rates of **18-26%**; those below 80% attendance had on-time graduation rates of only **5-13%**; however, those who had at least 95% attendance had more than double the on-time graduation rate of those below 90%.<sup>vi</sup>

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### ABSENCES ARE OFTEN LINKED TO NEGATIVE ADULT OUTCOMES

- 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>vii</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>viii</sup>

### ATTENDANCE RATES HAVE IMPROVED GENERALLY IN GRADES K-8, BUT NOT IN HIGH SCHOOLS

- The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandated that schools track, report and meet certain test score and attendance standards for children in grades 1-8. In Maryland, elementary and middle schools with average daily attendance below 94% do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards. High schools are required to track scores and graduation rates. A likely consequence of these differential requirements is that attendance has improved statewide among elementary and middle grades' students, but not among high school students.<sup>ix</sup>
- In the 2009-2010 school year, the average attendance rate in Baltimore City was **93.6%** for elementary schools, **93.2%** for middle schools, and **82.6%** for high schools. These averages are far too low, and hide much lower attendance rates within certain schools and for certain populations. For instance, special education students in Baltimore high schools had an attendance rate of **77%**.<sup>x</sup>
- In Maryland, during the 2009-2010 school year, **6.2%** of elementary school students, **9.6%** of middle school students, and **18.1%** of high school students missed more than 20 school days. The rates were even higher in Baltimore; **13.9%** of elementary school students, **17.5%** of middle school students, and **41.9%** of high school students missed a month or more of school days.<sup>xi</sup>

### MARYLAND'S HABITUAL TRUANCY RATES HAVE REMAINED FLAT WHILE THE CITY'S HAVE DECREASED

- In the 2009-2010 school year, **2.25%** of Maryland public school students - **about 19,000 youth** - were habitually truant.<sup>xii</sup>
- During that same period, **8.00%** of Baltimore City public school students - **about 6,600 youth** - were habitually truant. This percentage is down from the city's **10.59%** habitual truant rate during the 2005-2006 school year.<sup>xiii</sup>

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

- Both state-wide, in Baltimore, and at all grade levels, special education students were more likely to be chronically absent than their regular education peers. More than half (**53.1%**) of Baltimore City high school special education students were chronically absent during the 2009-2010 school year.<sup>xiv</sup>
- During the 2009-2010 school year, students eligible for free and reduced price meals (FARM) were more likely to be chronically absent state-wide and in Baltimore at all grade levels. For example, about **44%** of Baltimore City high school FARM students were chronically absent.<sup>xv</sup>
- Males were slightly more likely to be chronically absent, although, on average across the state, Maryland high school female students were more likely to be absent (**18.4%**) than their male (**17.8%**) peers.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Data show that during the 2009-2010 school year, students with limited English proficiency (LEP) were less likely than non-LEP students at all grade levels to be chronically absent, both in Baltimore and in Maryland overall, with one exception. At the state level, **19.7%** of high school LEP students were chronically absent vs. **18.1%** of their non-LEP counterparts.<sup>xvii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Accountability and Assessment. Habitual Truants, Maryland Public Schools, 2009-2010. Accessed at <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/805A7BDE-C5E7-4106-81D9-D1F4008CCFC8/22121/habtru09.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Center for Social Organization of Schools. (2000). Survey of reasons 9th 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> Balfanz, R., & Boccanfuso, C. (2007). Falling off the path to graduation: Early indicators research brief. Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools.

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

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

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/020724.html>

<sup>x</sup> 2010 Maryland Report Card: Baltimore City Demographics. Accessed at

<http://mdreportcard.org/Demographics.aspx?K=30AAAA&WDATA=Local+School+System>

<sup>xi-xvii</sup> 2010 Maryland Report Card: Maryland State Demographics. Accessed at <http://mdreportcard.org/>

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