

# **Truancy Taskforce**

## **Strategic Plan for Addressing Chronic Truancy & Absenteeism in the District of Columbia**

**2015-2016**

**November 2015**

**(Working Draft)**

## Charge

The Truancy Taskforce (the Taskforce) is charged with developing a multiagency, community-wide effort to increase attendance and decrease truancy of students in DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools.

## Membership

The Taskforce is co-chaired by the Deputy Mayor of Education and Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services. The Taskforce additionally includes representatives from the following public offices, agencies and organizations:

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), Court Social Services Division (CSSD), DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB), DC Public Schools (DCPS), Department of Behavior Health (DBH), DC Trust, Department of Human Services (DHS), Deputy Mayor of Greater Economic Opportunity (DMGEO), Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice (DMPSJ), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Transportation (DOT), Justice Grants Administration (JGA), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE), Office of the Attorney General (OAG), State Board of Education (SBOE), the Offices of Chairmen Phil Mendelson and Councilmember David Grosso, public charter school leaders, and others.

## Structure & Approach

### Structure

The Taskforce is divided into four committees in order to address specific areas related to truancy:

- The **Steering Committee** develops and manages the strategic plan, objectives, meeting agendas, and program evaluation plans.
- The **Data Committee** develops common business rules, oversees integration of agency databases, and prepares analyses for committee and Taskforce meetings.
- The **Policy Committee** develops recommendations for legislation, regulations and business rules in support of objectives established by the Taskforce.
- The **Program Committee** coordinates and executes activities in support of the Taskforce in partnership with practitioners and the public.

Each committee meets as needed and reports at bi-monthly Taskforce meetings. Recommendations formulated in committee are submitted to the Steering Committee for review before being agendaized at Truancy Taskforce.

### Approach

The Taskforce meets bi-monthly and uses an EdStat model to increase attendance and decrease truancy. EdStat is an aggressive, data centric, problem-solving model for the District's education system. The model looks across agencies to identify efficiencies and recommend systemic policy changes. Periodic EdStats in truancy will inform a *measure, monitor, act* framework in which the Taskforce will collect and report on key data points (measure), regularly take stock of progress by analyzing and reviewing that data (monitor), and plan and implement a data-informed strategy (act).

## Current Policy

There are three primary pieces of legislation that address truancy in the District: 1) the Safe Children and Safe Neighborhoods Educational Neglect Mandatory Reporting Amendment Act of 2010; 2) the South Capitol Street Memorial Amendment Act of 2012; and 3) the Attendance and Accountability Act of 2013 (D.C. Code §4-1321.02 and §38-201 et seq.). Requirements of these acts include:

- Students ages 5 through 13 will be referred by schools to CFSA after ten unexcused absences.
- Students from ages 14 through 17 will be referred by schools to CSSD and OAG after fifteen unexcused absences.
- After a student's tenth unexcused absence, the Metropolitan Police Department, OSSE and parent or guardian must be notified.
- Guardians of students with unexcused absences may be charged with commission of a misdemeanor.

OSSE has additionally issued regulations that further define how schools implement these acts, including:

- Defining "present" as a single school day where a student is physically in attendance for at least 80% of the full instructional day.
- Requiring that an attendance related student support team (SST) meeting is held after five unexcused absences.

In the course of reviewing currently policy, the Taskforce identified two distinct driving goals behind these policies: The first is reducing student **truancy**, or unexcused absences, in order to promote student safety and well-being. Where a student's safety or well-being is put at risk because they are being neglected or are choosing to neglect their education, current policy dictates that a referral to CFSA or CSSD is warranted.

A second goal is to reduce all **absenteeism**, both excused and unexcused, in order to ensure District students are present for enough school to receive the benefit of their education. A student who is absent for a significant number of days, even if excused, misses out on valuable learning time and can take a toll on their educational progress and outcomes over time.

## Recent Trends

To date, the Taskforce has focused on two basic reporting measures: Chronic truancy and in-seat attendance.

The **in-seat attendance (ISA) rate** is the percentage of total schools days for which students were present. ISA rates continue to rise for both DCPS and public charter schools (PCS) in recent years:

- From the 2013-14 school year (SY) to SY 2014-15, the DCPS rate increased from 89% to 91.6% (a 2.6% increase) and the PCS rate increased from 90% to 92% (a 2% increase).

The **chronic truancy rate** is the percentage of students who have accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences in a given year. Overall, chronic truancy rates for both DCPS and PCS have recently seen a slight decline:

- From SY 2013-14 to SY 2014-15, DCPS's truancy rate decreased from 18.2% to 17.2% (a 1% decline) and PCS's rate decreased from 14.89% to 14.65% (0.33% decline).

The Taskforce also reports on the **referral rate**, or the extent to which chronically truant students receive the referrals currently required under the law, and the extent to which those referrals result in further engagement from CFSA and CSSD.

- In SY 2014-15, 10,754 chronically truant students were eligible for some form of referral. Of those, 59% were eligible for CFSA referral and 41% were eligible for a CSSD referral.
- DCPS referred 80% of the students eligible for a CFSA referral, while Public Charters referred 30% of the students eligible for a CFSA referral.
- DCPS referred 30% of the students eligible for a CSSD referral, while PCS referred 54% of the students eligible for a CSSD referral.
- Of the 10,754 students eligible for a CFSA referral or OAG petition in SY 2014-15 1,560 (approx. 15%) received the legislated intervention—meaning that a family assessment or investigation was pursued by CFSA or a youth was papered by OAG.

## Goals, Metrics & Targets

The Taskforce recognizes dual attendance goals related to education and safety. For SY 2015-2016, these goals are as follows:

**\*Goals and targets are a work in progress due to data limitations\***

### Education

- 1) Increase the rate of ISA by **0.5%** percentage point in school year 2016-17, as measured by the statewide rate for ISA.
- 2) Reduce the number of chronically absent students by **[Unable to set goal due to data limitations- forthcoming SY16-17]** percentage points in school year 2016-17, as measured by the statewide rate of chronic absenteeism for the District.
- 3) Reduce the number of individual students who are chronically absent from one year to the next by **[Unable to set goal due to data limitations- forthcoming SY16-17]** percentage points, as measured by a reduction in the number of students who were chronically absent in the year subsequent to a year in which they were chronically absent.

### Safety

- 4) Reduce the number of chronically truant students by **[Unable to set goal due to data limitations- forthcoming SY16-17]** percentage points in school year 2016-17, as measured by the statewide rate of truancy for the District.
- 5) Increase the rate of DCPS and PCSB compliance with required referrals of eligible students to CFSA and CSSD by **[Transitional year in law re: referral- forthcoming in SY2016-17]** percentage points in school year 2016-17, as measured by the rate at which students eligible for referral are actually referred by schools.
- 6) Reduce the number of students who are eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD year to year by **[Unable to set goal due to data limitations- forthcoming SY16-17]** percentage points, as measured by a reduction in the number of students who were eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD in the year subsequent to a year in which they were eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD.

## 2015-2016 Strategies & Milestones

The Taskforce has identified the following strategic activities that form a cycle of continuous improvement.

### Activity

### Timeline

#### PHASE 1: Understanding What Works

(Present)

- 1) **Adopt Every Student, Every Day: Citywide Plan for Action**
  - Engage and identify the role of all public partners
  - Partners set clear goals and performance metrics for their work
- 2) **Identify Best Practices for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Their Schools**
  - Compile national and local practices affecting results
  - Identify low and high cost interventions; initiate necessary cost studies
- 3) **Evaluate the Efficacy of Current Interventions**
  - Map current investments
  - Identify key data questions and conduct analyses
  - Collect and analyze data evaluating investments

#### PHASE 2: Aligning to What Works

(6 months)

- 1) **Align the Current Policy Landscape**
  - Make necessary changes to code and regulations
  - Develop guidance to support schools and districts with implementation
- 2) **Align Data Collection**
  - Align quarterly and annual reporting to reflect key questions related to continuous improvement, evaluation, and best practices
  - Develop a data plan that identifies additional key data points needed to inform policy
  - Set business rules around critical metrics
- 3) **Compare City Investments with Identified Needs**
  - Identify misalignment/inefficiencies

#### PHASE 3: Doing What Works

(One year)

- 1) **Communicate and Implement Changes in Policy**
  - Provide technical assistance to school leaders and educators
- 2) **Design and Implement an Attendance Campaign**
  - Launch public facing plan to improve attendance citywide
- 3) **Invest in Resources Aligned to What Works**
  - Match budget to identified needs

## 2015-2016 Truancy Taskforce Strategic Plan: Implementation Timeline

Activity	Committee	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	
<b>Understanding</b>																
<b>Adopt Citywide Plan for Action</b>	<b>Steering</b>															
Identify role of public partners	Steering															
Set clear partner goals/metrics	Taskforce															
<b>Identify Best Practices</b>	<b>Policy</b>															
Compile best practices	Policy															
Identify high/low cost interventions	Policy															
<b>Evaluate Investments</b>	<b>Program</b>															
Map current investments	Program															
Identify data questions/analyses	Program/Data															
Collect and analyze evaluation data	Program/Data															
<b>Aligning</b>																
<b>Align Current Policy</b>	<b>Policy</b>															
Make changes to code and regs	Policy															
Develop guidance	Policy															
<b>Align Data Collection</b>	<b>Data</b>															
Develop a data plan	Data/Policy															
Align quarterly/annual reporting	Data															
Set business rules around metrics	Data															
<b>Compare Investments</b>	<b>Program</b>															
Identify misalignment/inefficiencies	Progrm/Policy															
<b>Doing</b>																
<b>Communicate Changes</b>	<b>Program</b>															
Provide technical assistance	Progrm/Policy															
<b>Design Attendance Campaign</b>	<b>Program</b>															
Launch public facing plan	Program															
<b>Invest in Aligned Resources</b>	<b>Program</b>															
Match budget to identified needs	Progrm/Policy															