Truancy Taskforce

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

2015-2017

November 2016

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 (DCPS) and DC Public Charter Schools (PCS).

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 Housing Authority (DCHA), 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), Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE), Office of the Attorney General (OAG), State Board of Education (SBOE), the Offices of Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmember David Grosso, public charter school leaders, public advocates, program providers, 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 agendized 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 four primary pieces of legislation that address truancy and/or absenteeism 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; 3) the Attendance and Accountability Act of 2013 (D.C. Code §4-1321.02 and §38-201 et seq.); and 4) the School Attendance Clarification Amendment Act of 2015. Requirements of these acts include:

- Students ages 5 through 13 will be referred by schools to CFSA after ten full day unexcused absences.
- Students from ages 14 through 17 will be referred by schools to CSSD and OAG after fifteen full day unexcused absences for prosecution, diversion and community based interventions.
- 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 issued regulations approved by SBOE 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 attendance student support team (ASST) 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 forms of **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

Until 2016, the Taskforce had focused on two basic reporting measures: In-seat attendance and chronic truancy. In school year 2015-16, OSSE additionally reported on statewide chronic absenteeism for the first time.

The **in-seat attendance (ISA) rate** is the percentage of total schools days for which students were present. ISA rates continue to rise slightly for both DCPS and public charter schools (PCS) in recent years:
- From the 2014-15 school year (SY) to SY 2015-16, the DCPS rate increased from 89.5% to 89.7% (a 0.2% increase) and the PCS rate increased from 92% to 92.1% (a 0.1% 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 increase given the new uniform chronic truancy rate methodology:
- From SY 2014-15 to SY 2015-16, DCPS's truancy rate decreased from 17.2% to 16.8% (.4% decrease) and PCS's rate decreased from 14.7% to 14.5% (.2% decrease).

- In spring 2016, the Taskforce introduced a uniform methodology for calculating truancy across sectors. For SY 2015-16, the first year that this new methodology was applied, DCPS's truancy rate was 20.9% and PCS's rate was 19.8%. The statewide rate was 21.4%.

The **chronic absenteeism rate** is the percentage of students who have missed more than 10% of schools days for which they were enrolled in a District school.
- In SY 2015-16, the statewide rate of chronic absenteeism was 26.3%.

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 2015-16, 10,853 students were eligible for some form of referral. Of those, 58% were eligible for CFSA referral and 42% were eligible for a CSSD referral.
- In SY 2015-16, DCPS referred 80% of the students eligible for a CFSA referral, while PCS do not report on the number of referrals made.
- In SY 2015-16, DCPS referred 27.6% of the students eligible for a CSSD referral, while PCS do not report on the number of referrals made.

Goals, Metrics & Targets

The Taskforce recognizes dual attendance goals related to education and safety. For SY 2016-2017, these goals are as follows:

Education

1) Reduce the number of chronically absent students by *ten percentage points (PP)* over the next three years, as measured by the statewide rate of chronic absenteeism in DC.

Metric	Current Rate	SY 2016-17 Goal	SY 2017-18 Goal	SY 2018-19 Goal
Chronic Absenteeism	26.3%	Reduce by 2 PP (24.3%)	Reduce by 3 PP (21.3%)	Reduce by 5 PP (16.3%)
		Total of 10 PP Reduction over the Next 3 Years		

Safety

2) Reduce the number of chronically truant students by *two percentage points* in school year 2016-17, as measured by the statewide rate of truancy for the District.

Metric	Current Rate	SY 2016-17 Goal	SY 2017-18 Goal	SY 2018-19 Goal
Truancy	21.4%	Reduce by 2 PP (19.4%)	Reduce by 3 PP (16.4%)	Reduce by 5 PP (11.4%)
		Total of 10 PP Reduction over the Next 3 Years		

3) Increase the rate of DCPS and PCSB compliance with required referrals of eligible students to CFSA and CSSD by *ten percentage points* in school year 2016-17, as measured by the rate at which students eligible for referral are actually referred by schools.

Future Metrics

1) Reduce the number of profoundly and severely chronically absent students by segment, as measured by the percentage of students who moved from missing more than 20% or 30% of the school year to missing less than 20% or 30%, respectively.

2) Reduce the number of students who are eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD year to year, 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 identified the following strategic activities that resulted in completing a number of milestones.

Activity   **Timeline**

PHASE 1: Understanding What Works   **(Nov. 2015-Feb. 2016)**

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   **(Mar. 2016-June 2016)**

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   **(July 2016-Dec 2016)**

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

MILESTONES:

1) Adopted Every Student, Every Day Citywide Plan
2) Launched the Every Day Counts! Citywide Attendance Campaign
3) Identified Best Practices for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Their Schools
4) Hosted inaugural attendance design challenge for students
5) Reported out on truancy and chronic absenteeism using uniform methodology at district and state levels

2016-2017 Strategies & Milestones

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

Activity   **Timeline**

PHASE 4: Advance Implementation of SY 2015-16 Learning   (Nov. 2016-Mar. 2017)

1) **Advance Citywide Planning**
   - Identify agency and entity-specific strategies to support adopted citywide plan and Taskforce goals
   - Plan budget needed to support effective activities identified in FY18
2) **Incorporate Youth Input**
   - Select and onboard student representatives
   - Identify key plan areas for youth input and voice
   - Support youth in leading planning for Attendance Design Challenge II
3) **Align Agency Work**
   - Incorporate attendance into new policies and investments (e.g., School Health Services Program)
   - Identify existing opportunities to add focus on attendance (e.g., OSSE PD offerings)
   - Provide guidance in areas identified in FY 16 as needing clarity

PHASE 5: Engage in a Cycle of Continuous Improvement   (Jan. 2017-June 2017)

1) **Strengthen Strategic Use of Data**
   - Develop and implement strategic timeline for Ed Stat across SY 16-17
   - Revisit codes and regulations to match evidence of impact
   - Improve data sharing across education, health and justice areas
2) **Expand Attendance.dc.gov**
   - Expand resources for LEAs and families on attendance.dc.org
   - Increase site usage by improving communications and advertising
3) **Increase Community Outreach**
   - Add new elements to citywide campaign (e.g., focus on families, homeless, high school, etc.)

PHASE 6: Scale What Works   (May 2017-Dec. 2017)

1) **Focus on Evidence**
   - Continue building evidence base for truancy and absenteeism interventions
   - Build support for strategies proven to be effective (e.g., mentoring programs)
2) **Communicate and Implement Best Practices**
   - Share evidence-based practices with practitioners
   - Plan FY19 budget needed to support effective activities

Appendix I: SY 2015 – 2016 Truancy Taskforce Strategic Plan: Implementation Timeline

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

Activity	Committee	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Advancing		■	■	■	■	■									
Advance Citywide Planning	**Steering**														
Identify agency/entity strategies	Taskforce	■	■	■	■	■									
Plan FY18 budget needed	Steering	■	■	■	■	■									
Incorporate Youth Input	**Program**														
Select and onboard student reps	Steering	■													
Identify opps for youth input	Steering	■	■	■	■										
Support Design Challenge II	Program	■	■	■	■	■									
Align Agency Work	**Policy**														
Incorporate attend. in new work	Policy	■	■	■	■	■									
Identify existing opportunities	Policy	■	■	■	■	■									
Provide guidance where needed	Policy	■	■	■	■	■									
Improving						■	■	■	■	■	■				
Strengthen Strategic Use of Data	**Data**														
Develop timeline for Ed Stat	Data/Policy		■	■											
Revisit codes/regs to match evidnce	Policy		■	■	■	■	■	■							
Improve agency data sharing	Data		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
Expand Attendance.dc.gov	**Program**														
Expand resources →LEAs/families	Policy				■	■	■	■	■	■					
Increase site usage + comms	Program				■	■	■	■	■	■					
Increase Community Outreach	**Program**														
Add new campaign elements	Program				■	■	■	■	■	■					
Scaling									■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Focus on Evidence	**Policy**														
Continue building evidence base	Data/Policy									■	■	■	■	■	■
Build support for effective stratgies	Policy									■	■	■	■	■	■
Comm./Implement Best Practices	**Program**														
Share practices w/ practitioners	Program									■	■	■	■	■	■
Plan FY19 budget support	Steering									■	■	■	■	■	■