

Milwaukee Public Schools

Presentation on Truancy to
the Milwaukee Common
Council's Public Safety
Committee

Habitual Truants

- The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) defines a “habitual truant” as a student who has five or more unexcused absences in one of the two semesters. Under this definition, a student with an attendance rate of 94.5% (five unexcused absences) qualifies as a habitual truant.

Attendance/Absences

- The following reasons listed are considered by the school as legally excused absences.
 - Personal illness
 - Funerals
 - Required legal appearances
 - Designated religious holidays
 - Medical or dental appointments
 - Family emergencies – student absences which contribute to the health, safety or financial well-being of the family
 - Driver's examinations
 - Educationally beneficial activities approved by the school principal
 - School suspensions up to fifteen days, only during the expulsion process

Attendance/Absences

- An absence by a student may be excused by the school principal when the school receives a report of the absence from the parent or guardian either in writing; via electronic format (for example by transcribed telephone calls or transcribed voicemail, e-mail or fax); or by any other method of personal contact of which a written record is kept by the school. The statement must be presented within 48 hours after the student's return to school, or the absence shall be considered a truancy.

Habitual Truancy Rates in the Milwaukee Public School District

Data from DPI WINSS Database

School Year	K-12 Enrollment	Habitual Truants	Percent of Enrollment Classified as Habitual Truants
2001-02	90,894	45,659	50.2%
2002-03	90,262	41,586	46.1%
2003-04	89,994	40,847	45.4%
2004-05	86,822	40,715	46.9%
2005-06	85,012	41,621	49.0%
2006-07	82,658	38,277	46.3%

Attendance Rate

- In 2006-07, the attendance rate for MPS was 87.7%
 - The attendance rate for elementary students in MPS was 92.6% .
 - The attendance rate for middle grade students was 89.1%
 - The attendance rate for high school students was 79.4%.
 - Data from MPS 2006-07 District Report Card

What is your evaluation of the TABS program? What changes, if any, would you recommend to increase its impact on reducing truancy?

- The Truancy Abatement & Burglary Suppression (TABS) program was established in November 1993. The program was designed to address the issues of truancy and juvenile crime in our community. It was not intended to be the answer for all truancy problems in the City of Milwaukee. It is only one part of a community-wide effort that is needed to combat the problem.

- In the past 14 school years, many changes have occurred within the program, but TABS' mission remains the same. The mission of the TABS Program is to intervene with students who are truant, deterring them from involvement in the criminal justice system.
- The TABS program interacts with students on the street without a valid school excuse. Students that are habitual truants are a significant majority of the students conveyed to the TABS centers.

- The TABS program is doing extremely well based on year-end evaluations and based on demographics of the targeted population and the resources available. Some of the key components of TABS are as follows:
 - Identifies and removes truant youth off of the streets during school hours.
 - Assesses truant youth for a current school assignment.
 - Determines if student is a chronic truant.

- Assists in identifying barriers to consistent school attendance.
- Monitors to ensure re-entry and improved attendance.
- Assists in locating professionals who can support the family in making the necessary changes to positively impact school attendance.
- Processes referrals by school social workers to the TABS program for possible municipal citations.

TABS

- MPS officers assigned to TABS stop an average of 7,365 students each school year.
- In the 2007-08 school year, 3,937 students were brought to the TABS Centers because they were found without a valid excuse, an increase of 25% compared to the 2006-07 school year.
- Case Management activities were added to the TABS Program in the 1999-00 school year.
- Over 50% of case managed youth increased their attendance.

TABS

- An average of 86% of students picked up by TABS do not recidivate in the same school year.
- 1,098 citations were issued by the TABS officers during the 2007-08 school year. Court advocacy is offered if students improve their attendance.
- Student citations alone have not shown to be the most effective tool in impacting attendance or truancy rates.
- An average of 37% of students who received citations improved their attendance over the past six years.

TABS

- Residential daytime burglaries have dropped 49% since the TABS Program's inception.
- An average of 60 missing children are located and reunited with their parent or guardian each year.
- Truancy citations issued to adults (mostly parents and guardians) appear to have a slightly higher effect on truancy rates.
- An average of 44% of students whose parents have received citations increase their attendance since the 2002-03 school year.

TABS

- MPD cleared over 1,000 warrants (municipal and state) last school year. This number has increased over previous years.
- TABS staff makes over 1,000 referrals each year to outside social service and educational resources for the family.
- TABS has sought many outside grants to add more case management and social work services to the program. Currently, TABS has one additional truancy/gang prevention case manager working at the TABS South office. The officer also conducts groups on gang prevention and conflict resolution at several branches of the Clubs.

Recommendations

- As highlighted earlier, current staffing and center locations have served the community well. However, if the program was expanded with personnel and aligned to either MPS Transportation zones, MPD police districts, or MPS comprehensive or high school attendance zones; more effective interaction with the targeted student population can occur, resulting in a greater impact on reducing student truancy.

- Municipal parent citations have proven to be an effective intervention/prevention strategy. Expanding the strategy to target this student population can be an effective measure.
- Requiring parents of habitual truants to attend classes on restorative practice related to student truancy in place of municipal citations could be another intervention/prevention strategy.

Does your agency provide funding and/or staffing independent of the TABS program to reduce truancy and encourage regular school attendance?

- Yes. All MPS schools are required to maintain and monitor accurate student attendance. These records are kept electronically in the student database. The principal/school leader is responsible for monitoring the attendance.
- All school staff are required to follow the district truancy policy and initiate the different levels of truancy intervention as needed.

Truancy Intervention

- Identify truant students
 - Guarantee informational contact with the student's parent/guardian.
 - Initiate conferences to resolve the truancy issues.
 - Conferences may result in a variety of solutions to the truancy issue.
 - If conferences do not occur, other solutions to the truancy issue are implemented.

- Attendance data is monitored at Central Services to ensure data quality.
- Schools have attendance incentives (i.e. prizes, awards, special programs) for students to encourage good and improved attendance.
- Strategies have been identified in the MPS Student Management Functional Plan for improving attendance across the district.
- Special funding for improving attendance in eight targeted schools.

Has or will MPS take any steps to adopt the “best practices” suggested in the Legislative Audit Bureau report to reduce truancy?

- MPS has already implemented and will continue to use the recommended best practices outlined in the Legislative Audit Bureau Report to reduce truancy.

Best Practices

- Regularly review compliance with statutory requirements for attendance monitoring and truancy planning.
 - No Child Left Behind (NCLB) attendance requirements (yearly benchmarks).
 - During the last school year, a review of board attendance and truancy policies and procedures was started to ensure compliance with state statutes.

Best Practices

- Monitor habitual truancy at each grade level and develop strategies to minimize truancy in the early grades.
 - MPS Safe Streets Initiative works with students at targeted schools in grades 3 through 8, as well as their siblings on attendance.
 - This program is at six targeted elementary schools.
 - Besides the district polices, each school has its own attendance and truancy strategies.

Best Practices

- Identify alternative programming to help truant high school pupils obtain high school diplomas.
 - Night School
 - GED Option 2
 - Transition High School
 - Alternative Schools
 - Creative Option Seats (COS)

Best Practices

- Involve parents and guardians in truancy-related matters.
 - Truancy intervention letters, phone calls (automated and personal), and now expanding to include email contacts
 - Collaborative Support Teams (CST)
 - TABS

Best Practices

- Identify and collaborate with community service providers to meet the needs of habitually truant pupils.
 - Milwaukee Alliance of Attendance-Education Sub-Committee
 - Attendance Challenge (eight targeted high schools)
 - Violence Free Zone
 - Center for Neighborhood Enterprise
 - New Concepts
 - Running Rebels
 - Boys' and Girls' Club
 - TABS
 - Community Learning Centers

Best Practices

- Consider the full range of available sanctions for addressing truancy.
 - Warning Letters
 - Referrals to TABS
 - Municipal Citations
 - District Attorney Referrals
 - Sanctions involving participation in school and after school activities

Best Practices

- Evaluate and modify, as necessary, their truancy reduction efforts on a regular basis.
 - NCLB
 - School Educational Plans
 - Truancy Plan
 - District Functional Plans
 - District reports, internal and external entities

Summary

- Milwaukee Public Schools has the following initiatives in place to address truancy:
 - MPS Truancy Plan
 - County Truancy Plan
 - District Functional Plans
 - A variety of “best practices” identified by DPI
 - School-wide initiatives
 - TABS

Summary

- While we know that improvement is needed, many of the unexcused absences (truancies) are the result of parents and guardians not submitting a valid excuse for their children's absences.
- MPS is always willing to engage in discussions with the City on developing meaningful collaboration on addressing the truancy issue and importance of parents submitting valid excuses for their children.

Questions and Answers