



Milwaukee Public Schools

September 2008

The Facts on Truancy, Attendance in MPS

The Wisconsin State Legislative Audit Bureau has released a report on school truancy. It asserted that state-wide, more than 9% of the state's public school students were truant during the 2006-2007 school year, with the rate significantly higher (46%) in the Milwaukee Public Schools.

In looking at the data, it's important to understand how the State of Wisconsin defines truancy.

All public schools annually report their attendance and truancy rates to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and the Legislative Audit Bureau uses these figures in its report. Wisconsin law defines a "habitual truant" as a student with five or more unexcused absences during one semester of a school year. A student with the *minimum* number of unexcused absences could have an attendance rate of 97%, yet still be defined as habitually truant. The attendance rates in MPS ranged from 93% in the elementary grades in 2006-07, to 84% in the high school grades for that same year. The state's own target goal for attendance in 2006 was 85%.

When we hear the term "habitual truant" we may believe that such a student is chronically absent. Yet students with 20 or more unexcused absences would still have an attendance rate of 88%.

MPS actively works with the Milwaukee Police Department to address attendance issues through the TABS program (Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression). MPS administrators are part of the Milwaukee Alliance for Attendance, a task force that includes the City Attorney's office and DPI. In addition, eight MPS schools have shared in federal grant money to address the problem by employing extra social workers and doing family outreach within their school communities. "In the end, the very best intervention is still a family's own commitment to seeing that children attend classes," said MPS Superintendent William Andrekopoulos.

MPS is Wisconsin's largest public school district, serving 87,000 students. District achievement is guided by its *Working Together, Achieving More* strategic plan. For additional information, contact Roseann St. Aubin, MPS Communications Director, at (414) 475-8237.

Believe it!
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