

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Minnesota School Absenteeism and
Truancy Policies: A Report to
Hennepin County Attorney's Office

Capstone Project for PA 8081

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Executive Summary

This research project was commissioned by the Hennepin County Attorney Office's be@school truancy intervention program to explore whether Minnesota's 15-day drop statute is causing students to fall through cracks in the educational system. Minnesota Statute 126C.05, commonly referred to as the "15-day drop rule" mandates that students are dropped, or unenrolled, from a school's rolls once they have 15 consecutive unexcused absences. Some school staff in Hennepin County expressed concerns to be@school staff about the rule and whether changes are needed to ensure that students don't exit the educational system due to this rule and not come back.

We investigated absentee and truancy issues at the school, county, state and national levels in order to assess the effect of the 15-day rule. Qualitative interviews with 20 school administrators and other stakeholders provided important information that helped to reframe the problem and further focus our research. This qualitative research included interviews with the be@school program staff to ensure that we had a thorough understanding of their county-wide truancy intervention program. Key findings from the qualitative research included a lack of clarity and consistency about attendance policies and procedures, the variety of ways in which truancy interventions are handled in schools, the need for resources to reach out to absent students and an agreement that there is a problem with kids falling through the cracks.

With more clarity on the truancy problem based on the interviews, the team embarked on a literature review to further inform the research. A national scan revealed that school attendance is vital for positive student outcomes and that absenteeism leads to poor academic

achievement and problems such as juvenile crime, unsafe behaviors and dropping out of high school. National policies on truancy intervention statutes and school funding were investigated in order to determine best practices and potential improvements to Minnesota's system. This included research on Average Daily Membership, which is a count of the number of pupils on the current roll of the school, and is the basis for Minnesota's 15-day drop rule.

Minnesota statutes were carefully reviewed to determine what is currently in place related to attendance and truancy policies. There are three main statutes that are related to this topic, with compulsory attendance being the first. This part of the statute requires school attendance for children aged 7 to 17, stating that schools "may" hire attendance officers, but these people must track absenteeism. It also allows for variations at the local level for unexcused absences and established a misdemeanor penalty for parents and guardians who do not enforce the school attendance law. Another statute related to truancy is related to school funding that requires students be unenrolled after 15 unexcused absences. The final statute defines habitual and chronic truants, requires that a letter be sent home after three unexcused absences and lays out numerous truancy solutions using "may" language that establishes them as best practices instead of mandates.

To better understand how attendance and truancy policies were implemented at the school level, we conducted an analysis of the various attendance policies in Hennepin County school districts. Key findings included a similarity in policy statements with regard to compulsory attendance, parental obligations and the process of accounting for students. However, in terms of the detailed attendance policy procedures, we found out that each school

district in Hennepin County has different policy approaches for enforcing regular school attendance.

In addition, we conducted a quantitative analysis to determine the scope of the problem as it related to the 15-day drop rule. We requested data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in order to quantify how many students were impacted by the 15-day drop rule, and asked that the list be cross-checked with the following school year to see if the students re-enrolled at another Minnesota school. Unfortunately, getting the data we wanted was challenging, but we eventually determined that a statewide problem exists, and that some students were falling through the cracks. A new report, called MARSS 61, which was instituted in the fall of 2013, is cross-checking students from one year to the next. It provides similar information to what we had originally requested, and has the potential to address the data management problem reported by the schools to be@school.

Based on our qualitative and quantitative research, we arrived at three main conclusions. We found that intervention programs are inconsistently administered across the state; students who are unenrolled after 15 consecutive unexcused absences are not easily tracked; and the state data system does not facilitate the sharing of student enrollment status between schools. This led to us make recommendations for changes to Minnesota statutes as well as to the data management systems related to monitoring students. Statute changes we recommend include mandating that schools designate an attendance officer and that counties lead efforts with school districts to develop and formalize intervention plans. An oversight structure at MDE will need to be created to facilitate the approval of the intervention plans developed in each county. We also recommend that schools use the MARSS 61 report to better

identify which students are truly missing, and that MDE expand the MARSS 61 report from grades 9-12 to K-12 to ensure that as many students as possible are identified.

Problem Definition

It is clear that too many students are not graduating from Minnesota high schools. If children do not attend school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers. Chronic truancy can lead to juvenile delinquency and crime, resulting in higher costs to taxpayers and lost opportunity for youth. In the Twin Cities, more than 24% of public school students were chronically absent in 2012 (Minneapolis Public Schools, Saint Paul Public Schools).

be@school, a Hennepin County truancy prevention program, partners with school districts to increase school attendance and improve community connections. School districts within Hennepin County have sought policy guidance from be@school staff in different areas of school attendance. One of these policy issues is related to the Minnesota statute regarding unenrollment or withdrawal of students, commonly referred to as the “15-day drop rule”. The problem was identified by be@school staff in the following manner:

If a child has 15 consecutive days of unexcused absences, the school will no longer receive state funding for the child. Typically the student is dropped from the school’s enrollment list. Because the student is no longer enrolled at a school, no one is responsible to report educational neglect or truancy to the county. A solution is sought to prevent these students from falling through the cracks (Sobczak 2013).

After researching the issue at a school, county, state, and national level, and conducting one-on-one interviews with stakeholders across Hennepin County, the Twin Cities Metro Area, and Greater Minnesota, we reframed the problem and our research focus into three areas: intervention, policy and reporting.

- Intervention programs to address truant behavior are inconsistently administered across the state. Coordination between schools, districts, and counties vary widely, affecting the timeliness, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness of intervention programs.
- State statutes regarding truancy allow for local interpretation and management of truancy prevention measures. One of the few mandated actions affecting truancy is the requirement for schools to drop student from their enrollment after the students have accumulated 15 consecutive unexcused absences. Students who are unenrolled after 15 days are not easily tracked and there are no consistent measures in place to provide them social services and encourage their re-enrollment.
- The State of Minnesota Department of Education data system does not facilitate the sharing of student enrollment statuses between schools. Reporting practices are inconsistently applied, including proper coding of students who have been unenrolled or re-enrolled and the process of requesting records from students' prior schools.

The culmination of these factors result in: 1) lower graduation rates across the state and 2) insufficient measures to track unenrolled students and/or provide them appropriate services to encourage their re-enrollment in school.

Methodology

The methodology for our research began with interviewing 20 school administrators and other stakeholders to gather qualitative data to inform our approach while assessing the viability of solutions, potentially including changing the Minnesota statute regarding unenrollment after 15 days of consecutive unexcused absences. Themes and insights from the interviews informed our recommendations.

Research included a literature scan of the impact of absenteeism to youth, student achievement and juvenile crime, which is particularly relevant to the Hennepin County Attorney's Office that houses be@school. The national research revealed significant variations in policy and implementation across states, which we documented to account for trends, patterns and best practices. In Minnesota, the research focused on legislation for compulsory attendance, truancy statutes and the intersection of policy and funding. We discovered several inconsistencies in the implementation of policy, and to test a hypothesis about accountability and tracking of unenrolled students, we requested data from MDE. While it was difficult to obtain relevant and timely data, we acquired sample data that proved the hypothesis that students who are unenrolled are often unaccounted for in the state of Minnesota. In other words, some students are falling through the cracks of statewide systems that are designed to provide education, social services and family support.

Hennepin County, which includes 22 school districts, was used as a case study to research district absentee policies to compare how attendance is accounted for, the reporting process, data management and other tactics that contribute to the complicated problem of chronic truancy. Details on the data inquiry, findings and resulting recommendations are provided below.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative research portion of this study focused on one-on-one interviews with stakeholders in Minnesota and across the country who deal with truancy issues either directly or through their own research. Summarized findings from the interviews are provided below, with comprehensive notes from select interviews provided in Appendix A.

We were provided with a list of school officials in Hennepin County who had worked with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office when the first project to pursue truancy solutions was initiated. We contacted these officials, or the appropriate replacement, and supplemented the contact list to reach a statewide audience, including randomly selected schools, districts, and counties outside of Hennepin County. Some were located in the Twin Cities metro area and others in greater Minnesota. All interviewees were asked a standard list of questions, outlined in Appendix B, which could be modified according to each interviewee's position and knowledge of truancy issues. Most interviews were performed over the phone or through email correspondence. For a complete list of interviewees and contacts, see Appendix C.

Respondent Demographics

- Schools: 1 in Hennepin County, 0 in Twin Cities metropolitan area, 4 in greater Minnesota
- School districts: 5 in Hennepin County, 1 in Twin Cities metropolitan area, 3 in greater Minnesota
- Counties: 1 in Hennepin County, 3 in Twin Cities metropolitan area
- Other: 1 social services organization, 1 school board association

Summarized Results of Stakeholder Interviews

All schools are required to have an individual or a group of people designated to track attendance and report the information to the district electronically, but in smaller schools, this task may not be the individual's only responsibility. Overall attendance is not reported to the county, but counties are typically contacted after students have accumulated multiple unexcused absences to bring in additional resources.

Intervention procedures vary by school and district. The most common processes include calling a student's home the day of an unexcused absence and mailing a letter to parents or guardians after a student has accumulated three unexcused absences (which is required in Minnesota statute). After seven unexcused absences, schools report students to the county, but comments suggest that timing of and adherence to this practice varies based on the in-house programs offered by each school and district and their relationship with the county.

There are a variety of programs and processes in place to prevent students from establishing habitually truant behavior, and schools try to intervene well before a student is truant for 15 consecutive days. In-home visits are often used to identify and address individual issues that are preventing students from regularly attending school. Individualized programs are often developed to address each student's needs. Not all schools or districts are able to hire additional staff – such as truancy officers, attendance facilitators, or social workers – to conduct in-home visits and manage the programs, and in some cases staff is assigned to more than one school.

County intervention systems are utilized at different times and with differing levels of consistency. The wide range of district and county sizes greatly influences the manner and frequency in which the jurisdictions work together to address truant behavior. School and district awareness of county-level assistance appears to vary by county size and personnel. For example, some school and county-level respondents in Hennepin County were not familiar with the be@school program despite its efforts to work collaboratively across the county on truancy intervention.

When students and their families cannot be reached, schools and counties acknowledge there is not much they can do, especially in cases where there are limited resources. Highly mobile families are particularly hard to reach, and the use of month-to-month cell phone contracts that can run out of minutes by the end of the month make phone calls an unreliable method for contacting families.

The way in which schools and districts handle students who have reached 15 days of consecutive absences varies and there is no consensus whether or not the 15-day drop rule is

enforced consistently. Some schools report marking students as unenrolled after 15 days, but at least one respondent reported delaying the step until a records request has been received from another school. Currently, schools are only informed that a student has enrolled somewhere else within the same year if they receive a records request, but a request is not always made. It is hypothesized that upon enrolling a student at a new school, some parents may not disclose where the student was previously enrolled in order to start with a clean record.

Some schools expressed difficulty with re-enrolling students after they had been unenrolled and were confused by laws surrounding the practice. A few comments suggested that this discourages them from dropping students who they believe have a chance of returning to school. This practice appears to be declining, though, as schools are becoming more familiar with the laws and realize they can re-enroll students within the same semester.

There are additional inconsistencies related to the way in which students are coded in the statewide data system once they've been dropped and/or re-enrolled elsewhere. A number of respondents indicated the need for a clearer definition of the 15-day drop rule and improved guidelines and enforcement of the corresponding coding system.

Many schools and districts state that once students are dropped, they no longer have the funding to continue tracking down the students. A few interviewees mentioned that the county or an agency will continue to contact the student and work with them, but some schools suggested that they do not know what happens to the students and whether or not someone else is able to continue working with them. If the school, district, or county cannot contact the family, there is little they can do, before and after the 15-day mark. If the student is over 16

years old (17 beginning with the 2014-2015 school year), there is nothing they can do, since the student is legally able to withdraw.

The existence of the 15-day drop rule does appear to influence the way in which schools, districts, and counties work together to prevent students from hitting that mark. Respondents noted that the rule acts as a threat and encourages collaboration between the jurisdictions. However, the fact that many students are inconsistently truant and therefore do not miss numerous days consecutively makes the policy less of a factor in those cases.

All respondents agreed there is a problem with students slipping through the cracks, but the 15-day drop rule seems to be only one of many contributing factors. The problem is greater for larger schools and districts, and with students over the age of 16. The most frequently cited factor was the lack of funding and resources to sufficiently staff the truancy intervention efforts and continue tracking students after the 15-day mark.

There was general agreement that the 15-day policy should remain in place. There are many systems tied to it, so changes would be difficult to implement, and some respondents indicated that unenrolling a student after three weeks of absences is the prudent thing to do. Most respondents are significantly more focused on what happens prior to the 15-day mark.

Interviewees called for clearer directives and possible mandates on intervention practices, along with increased funding and more social workers. Better guidance on who is responsible at what point in the intervention process would also help to streamline the system. A few respondents called for a statewide truancy prevention program. However, as one respondent noted, as long as funding is tied to student enrollment, the funding for increased

intervention will need to be protected from standard school funding so intervention can continue after a student is dropped. There are some discrepancies regarding who is best positioned to lead the effort for hard-to-reach students or unenrolled students. Schools may have the most up to date and accurate contact information, but counties or agencies may already be engaged with the students and may be better equipped to continue with the intervention. An improved tracking mechanism would also help.

be@school Program

be@school is a multi-level stakeholder, both client and interviewee, and our team conducted research with them on how best to improve the truancy intervention process in Minnesota. be@school is a county-wide truancy prevention program that operates under the leadership of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office (HCAO). It began as a pilot program with nine schools that were focusing on educational neglect (children under the age of 12) and in 2010 it became a county-wide program with a K – 12 focus (Ritchie). The be@school mission is “to increase school attendance and improve community connections across Hennepin County through a collaborative early intervention providing education and support services to school-age youth and their families” (Hennepin County Attorney).

After fielding concerns from school personnel, be@school staff sought help with research into Minnesota’s 15-day drop rule and how it impacts students and families. be@school’s program counselor, Alie Sobczak, approached the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School with a proposal that was ultimately chosen for a capstone project that was

the impetus for this paper. While the focus of the paper is on absentee policy, not program delivery, an overview of the program is provided to give context.

There are three main components to the be@school program model. The first step to a student's involvement with the be@school program occurs after six unexcused absences. At this time, the school will refer the student to the HCAO. A letter is sent to the parents directing them to attend a Parent Group Meeting (PGM). At the PGM, a be@school program counselor will explain compulsory school attendance laws, consequences for continued unexcused absences and services available to assist families. In some cases, families will be assigned to a community agency to provide social services. If there are three additional unexcused absences after the PGM meeting, the school will report educational neglect or truancy to the HCAO and a social worker will be assigned to help meet the child's educational needs. In many cases, a School Team for Attendance Review (STAR) meeting will be scheduled to develop a specific plan to improve attendance and prevent the matter from going to court. Students ages 12-15 who were previously referred to be@school will be invited to a STAR hearing at the Juvenile Justice Center. In these cases, a contracted community agency will be assigned and the STAR hearing is facilitated by a Hennepin County Attorney (HCA). The final component to the be@school program is that legal action may be taken if students continue to have unexcused absences. This could include the filing of a Child in Need of Protective Services (CHIPS) petition for children under 12, or the filing of a truancy petition in Juvenile Court for older children.

The HCAO budgets 1.5 million dollars annually to pay contracted agencies to work with the students and families that are referred to the program (Ritchie). Eleven social service agencies are currently contracted to do the work throughout the county, and this includes

culturally specific services. See Appendix D for the list of agencies. The be@school youth are referred by the program counselors to the agency that can best meet their needs. The typical service time period is 90 days, and parent permission is required for this step of the program. The goal for providing services through the contracted agencies is to re-establish a connection between the family and the school and make appropriate referrals for family services, such as food, housing, chemical dependency treatment, transportation, etc. Hennepin County staff reported during our interview that one contact in the school is often enough to get children back to school.

In the four years that be@school has been operating, there have been many lessons learned and great progress made in preventing truancy. One problem that was reported by Linda Ritchie, contract manager, and Alie Sobczak, program manager, is that there are a variety of people in the schools who manage the attendance reports and referrals to the program. be@school's goal is to have 6, 9, 12 and 15-day reports from the schools, but because of the variance in how schools do reporting and who does it, they found that 12.33 days is the average for the first report. The number of students being referred to be@school has grown steadily since its inception, making caseload management a challenge. In the 2010-2011 be@school annual report, the caseload was over 6000 youth and included 9,599 referrals and in 2012-2013, referrals increased to 12,095 (Hennepin County).

Despite these challenges, the results of be@school interventions have been very positive. Researchers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement found that during the 2010-11 school year "there was a significant reduction in unexcused absence rates for students who participated in the PGM intervention

and that 94% of the students at 30 days, and 69% of the students at 60 days had no unexcused absences post-STAR intervention” (Daugherty and Sheldon). The research showed that student attendance behavior improved significantly after the be@school program intervention and that students who worked with agencies had notably fewer absences than those who did not receive support.

be@school staff and the other stakeholders who were interviewed provided significant insight into the problem of absenteeism and the inconsistencies of policy and implementation. The school administrators, social workers, principals and teachers who we interviewed shared their expertise based on daily interaction with students, and their insights informed our potential solutions. In addition to these primary stakeholders, other secondary stakeholders inform the complicated problem of absenteeism, including students, parents, policy makers, case managers, nonprofit social service providers, national advocacy organizations and state departments of education. In the next section of the paper, we share additional insights from national stakeholders, including an analysis of national and local research, best practices and absenteeism policy.

Literature Review

Research on Absenteeism

There are many national and state organizations focused on improving attendance and reducing absenteeism, including Attendance Works, the National Center for School Engagement and Check & Connect. Attendance Works is a promising national and state initiative that promotes policy and practice around school attendance, and they are working to ensure

schools use attendance data to intervene early before absences result in academic and behavioral changes. Our recommendations include aligning be@school with Attendance Works to shape policy and develop an advocacy campaign. For details on national organizations that are leading the conversation and effectively managing public private partnerships, see Appendix E.

The national research on absenteeism definitively states that students need to attend school daily to succeed and that early intervention for chronic absenteeism is critical to ensure positive student outcomes and to prevent them from dropping out of school. Achievement, especially in math, is very sensitive to attendance, and an absence of even two weeks matters. Attendance also strongly affects standardized test scores and graduation and dropout rates (Balfanz and Byrnes).

If children don't show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers. National estimates are that 10-15%, or 5-7.5 million students, (Balfanz and Byrnes) are chronically absent, although the data are limited and many states and school districts face challenges with accurate measurement and reporting, as we describe below. In the Twin Cities, more than 24% of public school students were chronically absent in 2012 (Minneapolis Public Schools and Saint Paul Public Schools).

A study of the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that chronically absent students – those who miss ten percent (or nearly a month) of school – do worse academically. Poor attendance is a significant problem that starts much earlier than middle and high school. One in ten kindergarten and first grade students nationwide miss nearly a month of school each year. In

some cities, the rate is as high as one in four elementary students. In some schools, chronic absence affects fifty percent of all of the students (Chang).

Missing too much school in the early grades is one of the reasons so few low-income children are reading proficiently by the end of the third grade. Students who don't reach this benchmark are much less likely to graduate from high school because they start falling behind when they cannot read in order to learn. A Baltimore study found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation (Baltimore Education Research Consortium).

The children who are most truant are typically most at-risk in other areas of life and often face challenges such as homelessness, poverty, family conflict, poor health and nutrition and limited transportation. Children in poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent than affluent peers and are disproportionately affected because they lack the resources to make up for the time lost in the classroom (Chang). Chronic absence is disproportionately high among young African Americans and other children of color who are more likely to live in poor, low-income neighborhoods with high levels of community violence. Our team explored the potential correlation between absenteeism and youth violence and found that truancy can be both a cause and a consequence.

Given the unique position of be@school within the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, chronic truancy must be considered within the arena of the courts, particularly the juvenile justice system. Truancy is an early warning signal that students may be heading for delinquent activity and a lack of commitment to school has been identified as a risk factor for substance

abuse, teen pregnancy and delinquency (Finley). The correlation between truancy and juvenile crime is demonstrated in regional studies:

- Chronic truants are 12 times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, 21 times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and almost seven times as likely to have been arrested as non-truants (Henry & Huizinga, 2005).
- Data from the Rochester Youth Study show a clear, linear relationship between truancy and marijuana use (Finley).
- The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services conclude that serious truants are prone to substance abuse at much higher rates than non-truants (Finley).
- In 1991 and again in 1993, three grand juries in Dade County, FL analyzed the data from more than 5,000 of the county's most serious juvenile offenders and found that excessive truancy was one of the three traits most of them had in common (Finley).

Locally, the Minneapolis Police Department implemented the Northside Truancy Program to send officers to the homes of chronic truants. As a result of a collaborative campaign, crime rates in the Fourth Precinct decreased and truancy rates at Henry High School and North High School dropped (Przynski). Police and case workers also indicate that there are safety implications for youth who are chronically truant.

The be@school team and primary stakeholders expressed concerns about children who are unenrolled from school because they are not easily monitored and not accessible by social

services, leaving them more vulnerable to neglect and loss of educational opportunity. Based on this input and on the qualitative research findings, our research shifted to the national arena to identify benchmarks and best practices. In the next section of the paper, we present research findings on national policy, including the impact of absenteeism on school funding, trends across states and truancy intervention statutes.

Research on Policy and Statute: National

Nationally, there are many differences in how states fund school systems, including different metrics and complex formulas to determine general education revenue for schools. One method involves calculating Average Daily Membership (ADM), which counts the number of pupils on a school's current roll, averaged over the entire school year. ADM is used in 15 states across the country (Silverstein, Fermanich and Rainey), including Minnesota, which has been using the ADM system for more than two decades.

ADM is relevant to our research because it is a common aspect of state systems that necessarily define when a student is unenrolled due to absences. When a student is dropped from the school membership, or enrollment, this lowers the amount of state funding a school is eligible for because it is one less student being served. Minnesota funds each year on counts supplied by districts, and reconciles the difference in the projected count to actual ADM in the fall of the following school year (Silverstein, Fermanich and Rainey). The funding serves as an incentive to keep more students in school all year (Silverstein, Fermanich and Rainey).

ADM is also important because be@school staff expressed interest in potentially changing the 15-day drop policy. However, after looking for studies or literature specifically

around unenrollment policy and its effects, it became clear there is little research on unenrollment policies in ADM states. Therefore, we put together a sample of 15 states based on their appearance in two different papers around school funding. Of these 15 states, we found 13 state statutes that specifically list when a student is dropped from the rolls for funding purposes.

As outlined in Appendix F, there is a range of unenrollment deadlines across the states using an ADM funding system. The range of the policies is from 10 days of unexcused absences to up to 20 days in Nebraska (Silverstein, Fermanich and Rainey). The most common deadline, with 8 states in the sample, is 10 consecutive absences necessitating unenrollment. Minnesota stands at 15 days (Minnesota statute) and has for the last two decades (Silverstein, Fermanich and Rainey).

Across the country, truancy intervention is typically handled at the district or school level. However, most states establish general rules to serve as frameworks in which localized policies and procedures operate. A cursory scan of truancy statutes across the country reveals that the role of each state in truancy intervention varies. Some states play a stronger role and establish comprehensive regulations, many of which include criminal charges. Other states largely delegate the responsibility of developing and enforcing policies to the local level.

Much of the required or suggested actions are driven by the differing definitions of truancy in each state. The mandates take effect once a student has accumulated enough truantries to be labeled as a 'chronic' or 'habitual' truant. These terms are used throughout the state statutes.

There are, however, a few common themes worth noting. The most common mandated action across the country is a phone call or letter to the parent or legal guardian of a student after the student is considered truant. Often a phone call is required after one truancy, with a letter required after 3 to 5 truanancies. The requirement to have a truancy officer or an attendance officer is also a fairly common practice, many of whom are required to investigate individual cases of truancy. In many cases, this task is delegated to people with other roles, including school administrators, attendance supervisors, or principals (National Conference of State Legislatures).

Many states also allow for a complaint or a truancy petition to be filed with the county court. A few states require criminal charges to be brought against parents whose child has accumulated multiple truanancies, but more often the states give the local jurisdictions flexibility to choose criminal prosecution or not.

There are additional intervention procedures that appear in multiple state statutes, most of which simply serve to guide local jurisdictions in their development of truancy programs and procedures, and are not required. Examples include parent conferences or required volunteer time after multiple truanancies, individualized intervention programs which may include in-home teaching, non-criminal fines to parents, and yearly notices to parents regarding truancy policies.

While most states employ some kind of language encouraging the development of anti-truancy programs, a few states have gone a step further to require the development of such programs. Four states will be examined in closer detail to offer a few examples of more assertive language.

- Georgia recently began requiring each chief judge of the county superior court to establish a student attendance protocol committee for its county. The committees includes officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues with the purpose of outlining in detail the procedures to be used in identifying, reporting, investigating, and prosecuting cases of failing to comply with compulsory attendance policies. The committees' recommendations must be accompanied by a summary of possible consequences for failing to comply with the policies and must be distributed to local school districts (National Conference of State Legislatures).
- California made significant changes to its statutory language in 2011 which was recently accompanied by a lengthy report commissioned by the state's Attorney General, Kamala Harris. The statutory changes include a detailed description of what must occur after the first truancy, and what should be done after the second, third, fourth, fifth, and subsequent trancies. Referral to a School Attendance Review Board or its equivalent is required after the third truancy (The State of California).
- Pennsylvania provides comprehensive and detailed examples of how each district should develop policies and strategies to address trancies. While it doesn't go as far as to require anti-truancy programs, it does use strong language to encourage involving judges, juvenile probation departments and youth agencies in the development and implementation of such programs (Pennsylvania Department of Education).
- Maryland made an even more aggressive move and passed a bill in 2013 which requires the board of education for each county to develop a system of intervention for students

who have unexcused absences totaling eight or more in a quarter or 15 or more in a semester (National Conference of State Legislatures). The Maryland bill is a best practice that could be replicated in Minnesota: the language is simple, clear and directive. See Appendix G for sample language.

The analysis of state policies and practices revealed significant variations across the United States; however, a key finding is that states typically provide general guidance that is implemented at the district level. Of the states surveyed for unenrollment of students, referred to in Minnesota as the “15-day drop rule”, the average number of days for unenrollment is 12.2 days. Overall, Minnesota is on par with national policy, although there are some innovative practices to be learned from Maryland and Colorado, which are included in our recommendations below. In the next section of the paper, we analyze and critique Minnesota statute, which influences school district policy and is of significant interest to the be@school team, who suggested that a change in statute may be necessary to prevent absenteeism and improve intervention tactics.

Research on Policy and Statute: State of Minnesota

In Minnesota there are three main statutes that are related to school attendance, absenteeism and truancy.

Statute 120A.22

Statute 120A.22 deals with compulsory instruction for students. Although compulsory school attendance is loosely mandated by the federal government, as outlined in the U.S. Constitution, it is implemented at the state level. Statute 120A.22 states that parents are

“primarily responsible for assuring that the child acquires knowledge and skills that are essential for effective citizenship” (Statute 120A.22, Subdivision 1). The law requires school attendance for children aged 7 to 17, with exceptions outlined for children under 7, and those who are 17 may withdraw from school after meeting with their parent and school officials to discuss options. The statute also outlines requirements for curriculum, instructors and annual assessments that students must take.

Related to compulsory attendance and our research on absenteeism, this statute also addresses the transfer of student records. Two things that are mandated in subdivision seven include: schools receiving state funds must transfer student records within ten business days of a request from another school and that schools “must make reasonable efforts to determine the district, the charter school, or the nonpublic school in which a transferring student is next enrolling in order to comply with this subdivision” (Statute 120A.22, Subdivision 7). The statute goes on to require that schools transfer notices of formal suspension, expulsion, or exclusion disciplinary action and that students and families be notified that disciplinary records will be transferred as part of the student’s educational record.

A final noteworthy part of Statute 120A.22 for this research is that legitimate exemptions to compulsory instruction and related procedures are outlined. The law states that parents or guardians may apply to the school district to have a student excused. Alternatively, it may occur through a board member, truant officer, principal or superintendent. The three main areas of exemptions are for a child’s physical or mental health, that state and district standards have been met for graduation, and for up to three hours of religious instruction. The final part of this statute states “the clerk or any authorized officer of the board must issue and keep a

record of such excuses, under such rules as the board may from time to time establish” (Statute 120A.22, Subdivision 13). Therefore, while it is mandated that excused absences be recorded, it is left to individual school boards to determine the rules surrounding the requirement. This section also leaves fairly broad parameters in which students can be legitimately excused from school, as long as the parent or guardian is remaining in contact with the school about absences.

Statute 120A.30

Attendance officers in schools are addressed here, but the language is somewhat open for each school to interpret. It states that school boards “may” hire attendance officers, but then it goes on to discuss things those attendance officers must do. This includes investigate truancy and absenteeism from school, notify guardians when habitual truancy exists, make references to social services when available and follow all laws and district policies related to attendance. At the end of the statute it states that “attendance officers or other designated school officials must ensure that the notice required by section 260A.03 for a child who is a continuing truant is sent” (Statute 120A.30). This section indicates that someone must be responsible for getting notice out about continuing truants, but the previous parts of the statute seem applicable only if schools hire attendance officers.

Statute 120A.34

A penalty for the failure to follow the compulsory attendance law is established in this section. Parents, guardians, employers or students who flout the compulsory attendance law are subject to a petty misdemeanor. Any fines collected for this offense go “into the county

treasury for the benefit of the school district in which the offense is committed” (Statute 120A.34).

Statute 126C.05

This statute defines the way in which students are counted on a daily basis to obtain average daily membership. This represents the total number of students from the date of enrollment until the date of withdrawal. It is important because this calculation is used as part of the school funding formula and for other official counts. The date of withdrawal is clarified to mean the date a student permanently leaves the school, but also stipulates that a student “who has been absent from school for 15 consecutive school days during the regular school year or for five consecutive school days during summer school or intersession classes of flexible school year programs without receiving instruction in the home or hospital shall be dropped from the roll and classified as withdrawn” (Statute 126C.05). Students who are classified as withdrawn become more difficult to track because they are no longer on the school’s lists.

Statutes 260A.02 and .03

Statute 260A.02 refers to the compulsory education statute and defines a continuing truant as someone who misses school without a valid excuse for three days for elementary school students and “three or more class periods on three days if the child is in middle school, junior high school, or high school” (Statute 260A.02). It also clarifies that nothing prevents schools from addressing attendance issues prior to children becoming continuing truants. Statute 260A.03 goes on to require that parents be notified in writing that their child has been classified as a continuing truant. The statute specifies what the notification should include such

as the status as a truant, the need to provide the school with excuses when applicable, the compulsory attendance law and penalties parents and students can face for not following it, options available to remedy the situation, and a recommendation that parents attend school with the truant student for one day. This is one of the key parts of the attendance and truancy statutes, since it requires parental notification once a student is classified as a continuing truant and spells out what information must be part of that notification. As a result, this is a consistent part of attendance tracking that all schools follow, whereas most other parts of attendance policies are set by school districts and therefore vary across the state.

Statutes 260A.04 through 260A.07

There are four sections of the truancy statutes that are dedicated to ways to address truancy problems, but they all use “may” language that therefore establishes them as best practices that school districts may or may not choose to use. Some of the possible solutions that are laid out include: community-based truancy projects and service centers, community-based action centers, truancy service centers, school attendance review boards and county attorney truancy mediation programs. Each program is laid out in some depth with recommendations made for collaboration between schools, community service providers and county officials in order to best address truancy concerns. Based on these recommendations and the comparative research done by our team, Hennepin County’s be@school program stands out as a model program. However, because these sections of the statutes are not required, the usage of these programs varies widely across Minnesota.

Statutes 260C.007 and 260C.101

This statute defines child abuse and “child in need of protective services” (CHIPS) and it is relevant to this research because education is included as one of the vital needs for children. Those eligible for CHIPS are, amongst other things, “without necessary food, clothing, shelter, education, or other required care for the child's physical or mental health or morals.” (Statute 260C.007) There are sixteen areas outlined that make children eligible for CHIPS, and besides the one cited above, another one is “habitual truants”. The statute goes on to define habitual truants as those who miss school, without excuses, for “seven school days per school year if the child is in elementary school or for one or more class periods on seven school days per school year if the child is in middle school, junior high school, or high school” (Statute 260C.007).

Jurisdiction for CHIPS is placed under the juvenile court system in 260C.101, which is why the counties play a vital role in the issue of absenteeism and truancy. This is also why the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office has interest in addressing truancy through its be@school program.

Statutes 260C.141 and 260C.143

These statutes outline the petition and procedures involved in elevating a child to the CHIPS status. If there is a school attendance review board or county attorney mediation program operating in the child's school district, those procedures must be followed before a CHIPS petition can be filed. There are also procedures outlined for filing a petition, notification of the student and parents, and details of where students can be brought if they are discovered skipping school by police or truant officers.

Key information learned from the analysis of Minnesota statutes is that state law defines compulsory attendance and mandates procedures for parental notification after three unexcused absences; and statute mandates that students must be dropped from the rolls after missing 15 consecutive days. While it is clear that Minnesota has some regulations in place for enforcing regular school attendance, the implementation varies considerably at the school district level because of the flexibility built into current statute. Armed with a better understanding of national best practices and the laws governing the state of Minnesota, we turned next to an analysis of attendance policies in Hennepin County in order to gauge implementation.

Research on Policy: Hennepin County

We analyzed attendance policy differences at the school district level for districts within Hennepin County – see Appendix H for a map. An assessment of each school’s attendance policy revealed that policy statements are similar with regard to compulsory attendance, parental obligations and the process of accounting for students. For example, all schools include the following guidance on responsibilities in their policy statement:

- Students are required to attend all assigned classes every day that school is in session
- A parent or guardian has to ensure the student is attending school, inform the school if the student has to be absent for legal reasons, and work cooperatively with the school to enforce student’s regular school attendance
- Teachers are required to take daily attendance of students and to report accurate attendance record to schools on a daily basis; and administrators have the responsibility

to be familiar with all procedures governing attendance and maintain clear and accurate student attendance status daily.

However, in terms of the detailed attendance policy procedures, we found that each school district in Hennepin County has different policy approaches for enforcing regular school attendance. For example, school districts apply different methodologies for determining excused and unexcused absence. Minnesota state law provides that a school may include their own legitimate exemptions in the school's attendance policy (Minn. Stat. 120A.22, Subd. 12), which leads to variations in the definition of excused and unexcused absence. In other words, an absent student could be considered to have an unexcused absence in school A but not in school B. Such differences between schools in identifying excused and unexcused absence have created many difficulties and barriers for social workers and outside agencies who are working on early intervention for getting those absent student back to school (Tweed, Sobczak).

Other variances are related to intervention procedures for enforcing regular school attendance, such as when schools send the first notice or warning to parents, when schools should hold the first parent conference to discuss the student's absence, and when schools should file a petition with the court for increased intervention. We researched the attendance policies in 10 of the 22 school districts in Hennepin County, focusing on triggers for intervention. Some of the key findings are presented in Appendix I.

Such complex policy differences between schools make outside intervention difficult to deliver consistently and efficiently. Moreover, school attendance policies can differ by the age of students. For instance, the Edina School District in Hennepin County has three different attendance policies for managing its elementary students, middle school students, and high

school students. Furthermore, school attendance policies differ on whether student suspension should count as an unexcused absence, how much tardiness should equate to one unexcused absence, and how student absences from regular school attendance should negatively affect their grade. Despite that school policy is designed to follow the intent of the state's compulsory attendance law, such different policy implementation has created barriers for those working on early intervention, including Hennepin County and be@school (Tweed).

Quantitative Data Analysis

As a result of the varying attendance policies and challenges facing schools, tracking student attendance and student transfers can be complicated. Problem areas include the timely reporting of attendance data from schools to school districts and from schools or school districts to county programs; whether families alert schools about moves and transfers prior to departure; whether a new school requests a student's records from the old school; and whether school districts update a student's code when something changes in their record. Because schools do not have access to any data other than what they entered into the state student data tracking system managed by MDE, they are unable to track students who leave their school without notice.

In Minnesota, student data is tracked using the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS). MARSS is an individual student record system that serves as the Minnesota Department of Education's primary reporting system for student data. Each school district is responsible for entering their students' attendance data into the system as well as for tracking student withdrawals and transfers. There is a lengthy MARSS Manual that outlines

processes, procedures and reporting guidelines. Relevant to this research, there are twelve status end codes that are considered drop-out codes, and a thirteenth is code number 14, when a student is withdrawn after 15 consecutive day's absence, which becomes a dropout if they don't return to the district (Student Data/School Finance). Based on our review of the MARSS manual and our discussion with Sharon Peck, it appears that the data system is sound. Sharon shared that a new student number verification system was put into place within the last few years that has minimized error and greatly enhanced the quality of the data (Peck interview). As stated above, the problems arise because of staff resource and training issues and the difficulties when students transfer because schools are at the mercy of whether a records request is made in order to update student drop codes.

Initially, we began our data analysis trying to determine how large of a problem the 15-day drop rule is in Minnesota. We requested anonymous student level data from MDE in order to quantify how many students were impacted by the 15-day drop rule and asked that the list be cross-checked with the following school year to see if the students re-enrolled somewhere in Minnesota. The intent was to analyze student movement and to cross-reference unenrolled students from one year to the next to determine whether there was indeed a missing student problem, or whether this was largely a data tracking problem. Unfortunately, MDE was unable to get the requested data set for us, and instead provided a report of the total number of students who were unenrolled after 15 days of consecutive absence in fiscal years 2011, 2012 and a preliminary report for 2013 (through October 16, 2013).

In order to better quantify the problem with the 15-day drop rule based on the information we were provided by MDE, our team analyzed the statewide count of K-12

students who were unenrolled from the school rolls due to 15 days of consecutive absence compared to the total K-12 enrollment. Based on the data provided by MDE, we found that Hennepin County lost an average of .84% of K-12 students to the 15-day drop rule, compared to .94% at the state level. Details, provided below, demonstrate that the problem of unenrollment due to 15 days of consecutive absences is a statewide problem that merits a statewide solution.

Table 1. Unenrollment Due to 15-day Policy

	FY2103	FY2012	FY2011	Average
Hennepin County	.95% (1944 students)	.74% (1973 students)	.83% (1787 students)	.84% (1901 students)
State of Minnesota	1.04% (8640 students)	.92% (7625 students)	.87% (7149 students)	.94% (7805 students)

Within Hennepin County, some school districts, such as Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis Public Schools, have the highest unenrollment rates, suggesting that a proactive and targeted solution may be important in these districts. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess needs by school district, we have provided an analysis in Appendix J of unenrollment by Hennepin County school districts showing the percent of unenrolled students in each Hennepin County school district from FY11-13.

Sharon Peck of MDE, who provided the data, noted that the data does not tell us if the student re-enrolled elsewhere, and that it would likely not be a complete list of those coded this way because some 15-day drop codes would have been changed to transfers if they occurred within the same year. The inability of MDE to query the requested data and these caveats to the data confirmed our concern that these students were not being consistently tracked by anyone. This finding revealed inadequacies in the system that led to a recommendation for system improvement, as outlined below.

While the scope of the problem had been identified, we did not yet have data to analyze student movement and cross-reference unenrolled students from one year to the next. Students who had been reported as unenrolled due to the 15-day drop policy could have re-enrolled at any school at any time, or they could be unaccounted for. As an alternative to our initial request of year-to-year comparisons that would cross check those students who were on the 15-day drop list from last fiscal year to their status the following fiscal year, we asked for a small sample data query. Following this request, Sharon Peck from the MDE said, "I picked 10 students from the FY12 list to see if they re-enrolled anywhere after being reported as a 15-day withdrawal. Five of the students did not re-enroll in a Minnesota public school during FY12 or during FY13. Five re-enrolled in a Minnesota public school during FY12" (Peck, Request for Data Email Correspondence). The sample data is a small sample size that may not be statistically valid; however, it supported the hypothesis that the problem went beyond a data tracking issue and that the lack of a statewide solution for tracking students may be allowing students to fall through the cracks in the system.

Potential Solution: MARSS 61 Report on Unknowns for Graduation Cohort

While researching what data was available and the MARSS data process, our team found a new report that MDE and schools implemented in the fall of 2013. This report is called *MARSS 61: Unknowns for Graduation Cohorts*, and the impetus came from school data coordinators who wanted help in identifying students who may have left their graduation cohort. This information is important for schools, since students remain in their cohorts as a dropout unless they re-enroll or are coded as a transfer after a records request. In describing this report to schools, MDE stated: “This report will include those students who were last reported in any of grades 9-12 in your district in EOY FY 2013 without graduating, transferring to a nonpublic school or a school in another state, moving to another country or passing away. The students on this report have not been reported as enrolled in a Minnesota public school in the Fall FY 2014 MARSS Files” (MDE).

This report begins to do the cross-checking of data from one school year to the next that we had originally requested from MDE. For schools, it will assist with reducing each district’s unenrollment list by allowing them to re-code students who have transferred, and it will allow time to focus on locating those students whose location is unknown by the MDE. Anecdotally, we heard that this report helped the St. Paul school district cut down their fall unenrollment list from approximately 4500 to less than 2000 (Lyons). Currently, this report includes students who withdrew for any reason and it is only focused on grades 9-12, but it has the potential to address the data question and concerns that have arisen from this research.

Key Findings

Based on our quantitative analysis, we summarize that: 1) the data demonstrates that the problem of unenrollment due to 15 days of consecutive absences is a statewide problem that merits a statewide solution; 2) the sample data showed that in K-12 education, 50% of students who were initially reported as unenrolled would remain unaccounted for in the following school year and 3) the MARSS 61 report is proving helpful in cutting down each district's unenrollment list by allowing them to re-code students who have transferred and giving them time to focus on locating those students whose location is unknown by either the school or MDE.

Research Conclusions

Based on our research, we reach a broad and indisputable conclusion that attendance matters for educational success and intervention efforts are vital to keep students in school. We found from the stakeholder interviews that intervention programs are inconsistently administered across the state; students who are unenrolled after 15 consecutive unexcused absences are not easily tracked; and MDE data systems do not facilitate the sharing of student enrollment status between schools. Our interviewees also had a variety of solutions, including clearer directives and possible mandates on intervention practices, increased funding and more social workers to help with intervention efforts, better guidance on who is responsible during the intervention process, and the need for an improved tracking mechanism.

The national analysis of state policies and practices revealed significant variations across the United States, but similar to Minnesota, states typically provide general guidance that is

implemented at the district level. Of the states surveyed for unenrollment of students, the average number of days for unenrollment is 12.2 days. Overall, Minnesota is on par with national policy, although there are best practices to be learned from other states that influence our team's recommendations. Our analysis of Minnesota statutes clarified that only a few policies are mandated by language of obligation with the use of the word "shall", while many policies are only recommended with the use of the word "may". State law defines compulsory attendance in school, requires a notice to parents after three unexcused absences, and requires students to be dropped from the rolls after missing 15 consecutive days. With just a few obligatory mandates in place, implementation varies considerably at the school district level because of the flexibility built into current statute.

Similar to the national level, a look at attendance policy implementation in Hennepin County revealed some similarities across schools, but also a variety of policies based on age, definition of unexcused absences and timing of intervention. The quantitative analysis demonstrated that the problem of unenrollment due to 15 days of consecutive absences is a statewide problem that merits a statewide solution, that some students who are unenrolled may not be receiving any services and that the MARSS 61 report is proving helpful to schools in cutting down their unenrollment list.

Recommendations

The quantitative research on student unenrollment suggests that there is a statewide problem requiring a statewide solution, possibly through revised legislation. The qualitative research, as outlined above, identifies multiple inconsistencies in the implementation of

current statute and policies, as well as various methods of intervention at the district and school level. Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations:

1. **Retain the 15-day rule.** Given the consensus from the interviews that the 15-day drop rule is not a root cause of students falling through the cracks, and the assumed complications related to a change in the rule, we do not recommend making a change to the corresponding statute 126C.05, Subd. 8. Furthermore, our research found that Minnesota's 15-day drop rule is in line with the national average of 12.2 consecutive days before a student is unenrolled. The average is calculated from those schools using Average Daily Membership to count students for funding purposes.
2. **Strengthen truancy intervention programs.** As we have outlined, current policies and intervention programs are being inconsistently applied throughout Minnesota. Some schools are not reporting to counties, some schools are handling truancy matters within the schools, and counties are often not involved until truancy problems are far advanced. Our recommendation is to strengthen truancy intervention programs by mandating that counties and each school district collaborate to adopt intervention plans that clarify and create written policies. The plans would cover intervention programs for students still enrolled, and where additional funding allows, could include programs and practices for students who have been dropped due to the 15-day drop rule. Many of these plans already exist between counties, districts and schools, but formalizing them would create better understanding and awareness between the entities. Mandating that counties and school districts create the plans together would also leave much of the programmatic control to the local government entities and possibly lessen

pushback. These plans would need to be approved by the MDE; therefore an oversight structure at MDE would need to be created to facilitate the approval of the intervention plans developed in each county.

3. **Clarify statute on attendance officers.** Multiple stakeholders shared that there is no dedicated staff resource to monitor and report attendance, and the responsibility is often integrated with other job duties. We believe that dedicated resources would elevate accountability and provide some level of increased district-level coordination. The recommendation is to modify Minnesota statute on compulsory attendance 120A.30 by changing language from “school boards *may* hire attendance officers” to “school boards *shall designate* attendance officers.” By clarifying this language in statute, we believe that the importance of this role will be elevated and more attention will be paid to attendance and truancy tracking in schools.
4. **Improve data management and reporting.** There are multiple inconsistencies in data entry and reporting that make it difficult for counties and schools to provide services to youth and families. State data practices can shape how districts report and may create local accountability. The recommendation is to encourage school districts to use the MARSS 61 report to update “missing” student information/status. In addition, we recommend that MDE expand the scope of the MARSS 61 report from 9-12 grades to K-12 grades. This would facilitate monitoring students at the district level, which will help to clean up the data by finding students who have re-enrolled elsewhere. The remaining missing students would ideally be tracked in some way at the state level to try and find these children and provide services to the students and families who need resources in

order to allow them to return to school. Further, where opportunities exist, and as data sharing regulations allow, intervention programs and partners could benefit from being informed of the students who have been dropped and remain unaccounted.

5. **Develop partnerships for advocacy and public awareness.** Many parents and students do not realize how quickly early absences can add up to academic trouble. School administrators and teachers may not be familiar with be@school and other prevention programs across the state. A coordinated coalition for advocacy and public awareness can educate families and build a culture of attendance through early outreach, incentives and attention to student outcomes. The recommendation is to partner with national and local organizations such as Attendance Works and Check & Connect to leverage their resources, research results and best practices, to increase awareness of the problem and the solutions that be@school and other truancy programs provide. See Appendix E for details. For example, September is Attendance Awareness month and Attendance Works makes available data and collateral for a public relations message that could be integrated with the MDE and Hennepin County web sites.

Concluding Remarks and Next Steps

While great work is currently being done with truancy intervention throughout much of Minnesota, our research has shown that there is room to improve the system for the betterment of schools, students and families. We have summarized research around absenteeism, truancy, intervention and data management; yet, our recommendations are just a first step in a longer process needed to make systemic changes. A coalition will need to be built around this issue in order to make the legislative changes that are needed. Key stakeholders

will include county officials, school superintendents and principals, social workers, teachers and educational advocacy organizations. Although the fiscal impact of these recommendations should be limited by leaving flexibility to schools in designating an attendance officer and by allowing counties and school districts flexibility in creating their own intervention plans, an analysis must be done in order to bring legislation forward. The research on future cost savings realized in the juvenile detention system by early intervention should be a part of that analysis.

Recommendations have been made for changes that, if implemented, will improve truancy intervention efforts statewide and address the problem of students who are currently falling through cracks in the system. Given the level of interest expressed during our research, it is our hope that a coalition can easily be formed to champion this important issue and make needed changes to solve the problems around truancy and educational attainment for *all* students in Minnesota.

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Appendix A: Stakeholder Interview Notes

Corey Knighton, Assistant Principal, Red Wing High School:

"After students hit the 15 day mark, they're gone from the system so often nothing happens: the county attorney tends to drop the case. They may not be enrolled in a new school or new school district. We don't know what happens to those children."

"If we changed the MN statute to 10 days or 20 days, it wouldn't change anything. Those kids are not here. I can't find them. I have more of a chance with the habitual truants so a statewide truancy prevention program should be the solution: school, judicial and county in a collaborative effort."

Donna Olson, Legal Assistant, Dakota County Attorney's Office:

"We used to see schools send us referrals indicating they have dropped a child. I hardly see those notations on referrals at all anymore... I think with the truancy workers having closer contact on a regular basis with the individual schools has made a huge difference."

Dr. Charlene Myklebust, Director on Special Assignment Intermediate School District 287

"After 15 days of truancy, there is no funding stream to support the recoupment of students who have dropped out of school. School districts do not have personnel to track students who are no longer enrolled – resources are already taxed to serve the students who walk through our school doors. I wish that the education community had the will and the financial support to find lost students and help them re-enroll in a school that best suits their needs. When there is dropout recoupment intervention, as with Intermediate District 287's Diploma On! program, 58% of dropped students re-enroll and remain in a school of their choice. We could cut the dropout rate in half if we developed programs that emulate this model."

Heather Krause, Counselor, Mankato East High School:

"We have some good resources in place; we have a good system and buy-in from the county. We appreciate the support from our county partners."

"I wish there was something else we could do - some other consequence or avenue after a student has reached 15 days. It's like, 'Okay, you haven't been coming to school, instead of dropping you, what else can we provide for you?' It would be nice to have some sort of tracking mechanism to stay in contact with these students."

Astein Osei, Special Assignment Principal, Osseo School District

"Keep the 15 day policy in place. Changing the 15 day rule would be difficult and would require school systems to change other practices that are connected to this policy. It would be better to have a system in place that would provide more intensive intervention prior to 15 days of absence – home visits, sending communications, etc. Schools need well-funded mandates with higher expectations regarding what they do prior to the 15 day mark."

Bob Kincaid, Social Worker – Student Support Services, Minneapolis Public Schools:

"I would like to see anything to make kids safer - some way to keep track of them. Something beyond school districts may be necessary - a multi-agency solution. We cannot keep track of them when they're not enrolled. Data privacy issues also enter in when they are not MPS. In some cases we know the kids are out there, but they are not getting an education. We are limited in our ability to intervene or refer even the ones we are aware of. The more of a safety net we can provide, the better."

Scott Bjerke, Principal, Prairie Wind Middle School in Perham Public Schools:

"Even though the state “requires” us to “drop” a student from our database, we continue to track their attendance so they don’t just disappear off our radar. If we didn't have support from our County and if we didn't continue to keep track of them in some sort of way they could just slip by and disappear. We don’t want to have to “drop” any kid if we can help it."

Jinger Gustafson, Associate Superintendent, Anoka School District

"The gap in the system seems to be when students and families transfer school districts... This is an area in which I see students and families falling through the cracks from a school district and county standpoint."

Jabbar Washington, Truancy Coordinator, Brooklyn Center School District

"I see a huge problem with children following through the cracks. I think that a lack of resources aids in the amount of children that get lost in the shuffle."

Appendix B: Stakeholder Interview Questions

1. How is school absenteeism/truancy handled in your school district/county? Are there policies and social services that apply districtwide (or countywide)?
2. At what intervals are interventions activated (3-6-9-12-15 days)?
3. Who does the reporting to the district and the state?
4. What is the process for intervention after your school submits the data to the district and state?

5. Are you familiar with the state law that requires students to be unenrolled after 15 consecutive unexcused absences?
6. What impact does the law have on your school's policies and procedures for multiple unexcused absences?
7. What is the impact of student absenteeism/enrollment on your overall budget?
8. Do you believe the law is contributing to students 'falling through the cracks'?
9. Is there anything about the law you would like changed?
10. What happens to children after the 15-day drop? Are they immediately un-enrolled? What other services are provided?
11. Are you familiar with the social services available through Hennepin County's be@school program? Do you refer students to be@school?

Appendix C: Primary Stakeholders and Interviewees

Primary Stakeholders and Interviewees				
FName	Lname	Title	Organization	Sector
Jan	Bahlmann	Registrar	Marshall School District	Public Schools
Nicolas	Banovetz	Deputy Director	MinnCAN	Advocacy
Mark	Bezek		Elk River School District	Henn Cty public scho
Scott	Bjerke	Principal	Prairie Wind Middle School, Perha	Public Schools
Karla	Bratrud	Director	Eden Prairie School District	Henn Cty public scho
Donald	Bruce	Assistant County Attorney	Dakota County Attorney's office	Public Sector
Hedy	Change	Executive Director	Attendance Works	Nonprofit advocacy
Michael	Chmiel	Supervisor of Juvenile Dive	Anoka County Attorney's Office	Public sector
Denise	Dittrich	Research and Counsel	Minnesota School Board Associatio	Public Schools
Robert	Doty	COO	Minneapolis Public Schools	Henn Cty public scho
Paul	Durand		Rockford School District	Henn Cty public Scho
Linda	Gardner		Hopkins School District	Henn Cty public scho
Jinger	Gustafson	Associate superintendent f	Anoka-Hennepin School District	Henn Cty public scho
Jamie	Halpern	Manager, HSPHD	Hennepin County	Public sector
Gretchen	Hatch		Check & Connect	Intervention Program
Patrice	Howard		Brooklyn Center School District	Henn Cty public scho
Jim	Johnson	Director of Student Support	Minneapolis Public Schools	Henn Cty public scho
Bob	Kinkaid	Attendance Specialist	Minneapolis Public Schools	Henn Cty public scho
Cory	Knighton	Assistant Principal	Red Wing School District	Public Schools
Daron	Korte	Director of Government Aff	Minnesota Department of Educatio	Public Sector
Heather	Krause	School Counselor	Mankato School District	Public Schools
Cammy	Lehr		MN Department of Education	Public sector
Lisa	Lyons	Truancy Intervention Progra	St. Paul School District	Public schools
Renee	Mackelkey	Truancy Intervention Progra	Ramsey County Attorney Office	Public Sector
Todd	Meyer	Superintendent	Jackson County Central Public Scho	Public Schools
Charlene	Myklebust	Director on Special Assignm	Intermediate District 287	Public Schools
Donna	Olson	Legal Assistant	Dakota County Attorney's office	Public Sector
Astein	Osei	Principal on Special Assignm	Osseo School District	Henn Cty public scho
Chad	Pederson	Principal	Aitkin High School	Public schools
Alexia	Poppy	Social Worker	Intermediate District 287	Public sector
Linda	Rees	Communications Director	District 287	Public sector
Tami	Reynolds		St. Louis Park School District	Henn Cty public scho
Caalynn	Schiro	Program Manager	The Link	Community agency
Alice	Seuffert	Senior Policy Advisor	Association of Metropolitan Schoo	Public sector profes
Robert	Slotterback		Richfield School District	Henn Cty public scho
Tricia	Stelter	Assistant to Superintendent	Marshall School District	Public Schools
Eric	Thornton		Wayzata School District	Henn Cty public scho
Jabbar	Washington	Truancy Coordinator	Brooklyn Center School District	Public Schools

Appendix D: Social Service Agencies Providing Support to HCAO

Organization
Centro
Division of Indian Work
Emma B. Howe YMCA
Girls RAP
Headway
Hmong American Partnership
KaJoog
Lutheran Social Services
Northside Achievement Zone
Phyllis Wheatly
Pillsbury United Communities
The Family Partnership
The Legal Rights Center
The Link
YWCA

Appendix E: National Stakeholders

1. Attendance Works, a national and state initiative that promotes policy and practice around school attendance, is working to ensure schools use attendance data to intervene early before absences result in academic and behavioral changes. The executive director, Hedy Chang, formerly with Annie E. Casey Foundation, believes that chronic absence is solvable and is aligning stakeholders in a national partnership. Nineteen organizations partner with Attendance Works to build awareness, advance policy and build capacity to help schools, parents and community agencies track data and reduce chronic absences. Partners include United Way Worldwide, America's Promise Alliance, American Federation of Teachers and Children's Aid Society. Attendance Works hosts a biweekly conversation through The Network for Advancing State Policy and be@school staff may want to participate.
2. Check & Connect is a local program developed at the University of Minnesota in partnership with the Minneapolis School District to engage students. This is an evidence-based dropout prevention program that uses trained mentors to engage marginalized students in grades K-12 and keep them on track to graduate. The outcomes of Check & Connect include increased attendance, persistence in school, accrual of credits and school completion rates; and decreased truancy, tardies, behavioral referrals and dropout rates. (Attendance Works)
3. National Center for School Engagement was established within the Partnership for Families and Children, to provide training and technical assistance, research and

evaluation to school districts, law enforcement agencies, courts, as well as state and federal agencies. They are providing valuable research on the scope of the problem.

4. Education Commission of the States is a national organization formed in 1965 to help policymakers develop effective policy and practice for public education. They provide data, research, analysis, and leadership; facilitate collaboration and the exchange of ideas among the states. An extensive web site includes A-Z references on education issues and a policy database summarizing 40,000 pieces of enacted legislation.

Appendix F: Comparison of State Statute Regarding 15-day Unenrollment

States	Drop Policy Average Daily Membership (ADM) States
Arkansas	10 consecutive days
Minnesota	15 consecutive days
Nebraska	20 consecutive days
New Hampshire	On the 16th consecutive day
North Carolina	10 consecutive days
Oregon	10 consecutive days
Pennsylvania	10 consecutive days
Rhode Island	Does not drop students to calculate ADM, just uses the absences to calculate.
South Carolina	10 consecutive days
Tennessee	10 consecutive days
Utah	10 consecutive days
Vermont	10 consecutive days
Virginia	10 consecutive days

Appendix G: Maryland House Bill 207

In this section “truant student” means a student who is unlawfully absent from school for more than:

- (i) 8 days in any quarter;
- (ii) 15 days in any semester; or
- (iii) 20 days in a school year; and

Each county board shall develop a system of active intervention for truant students.

Each truant student attending kindergarten through 12th grade shall immediately be referred to the county board’s system of active intervention developed under this section.

This section does not prohibit a county board from intervening in the case of a student who is frequently absent from school for both lawful and unlawful purposes, but is not a truant student.

Appendix I: Comparison of Hennepin County Schools Intervention Policies

School District	First Notice/Warning	Parent Conference	File a Court Petition
St. Louis Park	3	5	Recurring absences
Eden Prairie	3	6	9
Brooklyn Center	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Wayzata	3	5	8
Anoka-Hennepin	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Bloomington	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Edina	3	9	Recurring absences
Minnetonka	1	3	Recurring absences
Minneapolis	1	3	6
Rockford	1	1	Recurring absences

Source: compiled from Hennepin County school district web sites. See References for details.

Appendix J: Percent of Unenrolled Students in Hennepin County FY11-13

Preliminary FY13, as of Oct 16th 2013			
Name	Count of withdraws	k-12 enrollment	percent of withdraw
Minneapolis	739	34387	2.10%
Anoka-Hennepin	356	37667	0.94%
Waconia	4	3559	0.11%
Watertown	0	1566	0.00%
Hokins	33	6942	0.47%
Bloomington	16	10265	0.16%
Eden Prairie	57	9144	0.62%
Edina	7	8323	0.08%
Minnetonka	11	9486	0.12%
Westonka	1	2226	0.04%
Orono	3	2777	0.11%
Osseo	211	20181	1.03%
Richfield	68	4313	1.55%
Robbinsdale	185	11984	1.52%
St. Anthony	7	1762	0.40%
St. Louis Park	37	4485	0.82%
Wayzata	9	10533	0.09%
Brooklyn Center	150	2153	6.51%
Elk River	28	12520	0.22%
Buffalo	17	5785	0.29%
Delano	4	2317	0.17%
Rockford	1	1585	0.06%
Total	1,944	203960	0.79%

FY12			
Name	Count of withdraws	k-12 enrollment	percent of withdraw
Minneapolis	588	33503	1.72%
Anoka-Hennepin	645	37933	1.67%
Waconia	0	3419	0.00%
Watertown	0	1562	0.00%
Hokins	30	7025	0.43%
Bloomington	22	10443	0.21%
Eden Prairie	68	9272	0.73%
Edina	17	8254	0.21%
Minnetonka	5	9044	0.06%
Westonka	2	2204	0.09%
Orono	3	2719	0.11%
Osseo	218	20252	1.06%
Richfield	78	4170	1.84%
Robbinsdale	82	11874	0.69%
St. Anthony	4	1771	0.23%
St. Louis Park	32	4375	0.73%
Wayzata	7	10426	0.07%
Brooklyn Center	130	2098	5.83%
Elk River	29	12539	0.23%
Buffalo	7	5749	0.12%
Delano	1	2282	0.04%
Rockford	5	1580	0.32%
Total	1973	202494	0.74%

FY11					
Name	Count of withdraws	k-12 enrollment	percent of withdraw		
Minneapolis	576	33415	1.69%		
Anoka-Hennepin	515	38334	1.33%		
Waconia	0	3313	0.00%		
Watertown	4	1581	0.25%		
Hokins	22	7156	0.31%		
Bloomington	12	10204	0.12%		
Eden Prairie	61	9620	0.63%		
Edina	14	8199	0.17%		
Minnetonka	5	8626	0.06%		
Westonka	6	2184	0.27%		
Orono	3	2760	0.11%		
Osseo	152	20409	0.74%		
Richfield	54	4026	1.32%		
Robbinsdale	64	11839	0.54%		
St. Anthony	2	1789	0.11%		
St. Louis Park	29	4343	0.66%		
Wayzata	8	10370	0.08%		
Brooklyn Center	224	2296	8.89%		
Elk River	13	12673	0.10%		
Buffalo	13	5782	0.22%		
Delano	4	2278	0.18%		
Rockford	6	1527	0.39%		
Total	1,787	202724	0.83%		

Source: Counts of withdrawn student due to 15-day drop rule, FY11, 12 and 13, Minnesota Department of Education, Oct16th, 2013. K-12 enrollment list, AYP Report in FY11, 12 and 13, Minnesota Department of Education, Dec 1st, 2013

Appendix K: Presentation to Client

Minnesota School Absenteeism and Truancy Policies

Report to Hennepin County Attorney's Office

December 5, 2013

Charles Bruce Kallen Hayes Kristine Kosek Nathan Miao Shannon Thompson

Presentation Outline

- Original Problem Definition
- Interview Findings
- Background Research
 - National Policies and Statutes
 - Minnesota Policies and Statutes
 - Hennepin County
- Data Analysis
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Next Steps



www.elliebrown.com

Problem Definition

As provided by be@school:

- If a student has 15 consecutive days of unexcused absences, the school will no longer receive state funding for the student.
- Typically the student is dropped from the school's enrollment list. Because the student is no longer enrolled at a school, no one is responsible to report educational neglect or truancy to the county.
- A solution is sought to prevent these students from falling through the cracks.

Stakeholder Interview Objectives

- The process for reporting – when, who, how?
- *Is there a problem with students falling through the cracks?*
- How does the 15-day policy influence school/county practices?
- *What happens after students hit the 15-day mark?*
- Are there inconsistencies in how the 15-day policy is applied?
- *What changes to the policy are desired and/or needed?*

Stakeholder Interview Findings

- Agreement on students falling through the cracks
 - Key factor: insufficient resources to track students and offer appropriate services
- Concern regarding lack of resources after students are dropped
 - who is left responsible? Is anyone funded to provide them services?

"After students hit the 15 day mark, they're gone from the system so often nothing happens: the county attorney tends to drop the case. They may not be enrolled in a new school or new school district. We don't know what happens to those children."

– Corey Knighton, Assistant Principal, Red Wing HS

Stakeholder Interview Findings

- Intervention procedures, programs, and staffing vary
 - Dependent upon school/district size and level of collaboration with the county
 - Social service agency involvement varies
- Variable adherence to 15-day drop rule
 - Some schools delay dropping students or wait for a records request

"Even though the state 'requires' us to 'drop' a student from our database, we continue to track their attendance so they don't just disappear off our radar. If we didn't have support from our County and if we didn't continue to keep track of them in some sort of way they could just slip by and disappear. "

– Scott Bjerke, Principal, Prairie Wind MS

Stakeholder Interview Findings

- Inconsistencies with unenrollment and re-enrollment reporting and coding practices
 - Confusion regarding proper coding practices
 - Inaccurate understanding of re-enrollment policies
- Highly mobile families can be difficult to reach at any point in the intervention process

"The gap in the system seems to be when students and families transfer school districts... This is an area in which I see students and families falling through the cracks from a school district and county standpoint."

– Jinger Gustafson, Associate Superintendent, Anoka School District

Reframing of the Problem

The 15-day drop policy
is not the biggest factor causing students
to fall through the cracks

Instead, stakeholders are more concerned with



Intervention
programs



Data input
and
management

National Unenrollment Policies and Statutes

STATE	POLICY
ARKANSAS	10 days
MINNESOTA	15 days
NEBRASKA	20 days
NEW HAMPSHIRE	16 days
NORTH CAROLINA	10 days
OREGON	10 days
PENNSYLVANIA	10 days
RHODE ISLAND	Does not drop
SOUTH CAROLINA	10 days
TENNESSEE	10 days
UTAH	10 days
VERMONT	10 days
VIRGINIA	15 days

A young man with brown hair, wearing a bright blue long-sleeved shirt, black pants, and black sneakers with white soles, is sitting on a light-colored floor against a plain white wall. He is leaning his head against the wall with his arms crossed over his knees, looking off to the side with a thoughtful or somber expression. The background is a simple, minimalist room with a white wall and a light-colored floor.

National Truancy Policies and Statutes

- Truancy intervention is typically handled at the district or school level; many states provide general guidelines, but few are required.
- A phone call or letter to the parent or legal guardian of a student after the first truancy is common.
- Many states also allow for a complaint or a truancy petition to be filed with the county court after multiple truanancies.

Minnesota Policies and Statutes

Statute 126C.05 – Average Daily Membership:

- Part of the formula used for state school funding
- Students who have been absent from school for 15 unexcused consecutive school days during the regular school year are unenrolled



Minnesota Policies and Statutes

Statute 260C:

- Parental notification required after three days of unexcused absences
- Seven unexcused absences may result in referral to county
- Truancy solutions all use “may” language, which establishes them as best practices - not mandates

Minnesota Policies and Statutes

Statute 120A – Compulsory attendance:

- Requires school attendance for children aged 7 to 17
- School boards “may” hire attendance officers
- Attendance officers or other designated school officials must track absenteeism and send continuing truant notices
- A petty misdemeanor is the penalty to guardians for failing to comply with compulsory attendance
- Allows variations at the local level regarding excused absences

Hennepin County Truancy Intervention Policies

School District	First Notice/Warning	Parent Conference	File a Court Petition
St. Louis Park	3	5	Recurring absences
Eden Prairie	3	6	9
Brooklyn Center	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Wayzata	3	5	8
Anoka-Hennepin	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Bloomington	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Not Mentioned
Edina	3	9	Recurring absences
Minnetonka	1	3	Recurring absences
Minneapolis	1	3	6
Rockford	1	1	Recurring absences

Data Analysis

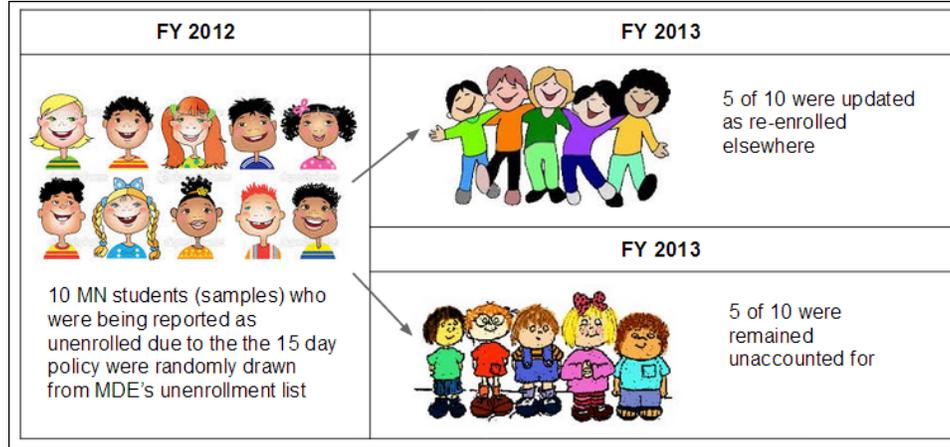
The following data was obtained:

- MDE’s counts of students reported as unenrolled due to the 15-day drop policy
- Sample drawn from unenrolled list due to 15-day drop policy
- MARSS 61 Report: Unknowns for Graduation Cohorts

Unenrollment due to 15-day policy: Hennepin County and Minnesota

	FY 2013 (as of 10/16/13)	FY 2012	FY 2011	Average
Hennepin County	0.95%	0.74%	0.83%	0.84% (1,901)
Statewide (MN)	1.04%	0.92%	0.87%	0.94% (7,805)

Sample Drawn: 10 students



MARSS 61: Unknowns for Graduation Cohorts

- Annual report
- First posted by MDE in Fall 2013
- Shows the list of students that districts reported in previous FY that cannot be “located”

- St. Paul school district: 4,500 → 2,000 students

Conclusions

- Students who are unenrolled after 15 consecutive unexcused absences are not easily tracked or provided services
 - *But, the 15-day policy is not the biggest problem, and it is consistent with other ADM state statutes*
- Intervention is more important
 - *But programs are inconsistently coordinated and administered across the state.*
- We learned:
 - Early intervention is better
 - Cross-sector collaboration is a best practice
 - Sufficient funding is needed

Conclusions

"After 15 days of truancy, there is no funding stream to support the recoupment of students who have dropped out of school. I wish that the education community had the will and the financial support to find lost students and help them re-enroll in a school that best suits their needs."

**– Dr. Charlene Myklebust, Director on Special Assignment,
Intermediate School District 287**

Conclusions

- The state's data system does not facilitate the sharing of student enrollment status between schools.
 - Data reporting is complicated for schools and districts
 - Re-enrollment is hard to track
- Until recently, state data was insufficient
 - MARSS 61 is helping

Recommendations

1. Retain the 15-day drop rule (126C.05 Subd.8)

"Keep the 15 day policy in place. Changing the 15 day rule would be difficult and would require school systems to change other practices that are connected to this policy. It would be better to have a system in place that would provide more intensive intervention prior to 15 days of absence."

– Astein Osei, Special Assignment Principal, Osseo School District

"If we changed the MN statute to 10 days or 20 days, it wouldn't change anything."

– Corey Knighton, Assistant Principal, Red Wing HS

Recommendations

Propose changes to statutory language

1. Mandate that schools designate an attendance officer (120A.30)
2. Mandate that counties lead efforts with school districts to develop and formalize intervention plans (260C)
 - Including possible post 15-day drop procedures
3. Create oversight structure within MDE for approval of intervention plans

Maryland's Statute – House Bill 207 (2013)

1. Each county board **shall** develop a system of active intervention for *truant* students.
2. Each *truant* student attending kindergarten through 12th grade **shall** be referred to the county board's system of active intervention developed under this section.

Recommendations

Improve data management/sharing

1. Encourage school districts to use the MARSS 61 report to update their unenrolled student list
2. Expand MARSS 61 to include K-12, not just 9-12

Considerations and Next Steps

1. Build a coalition of stakeholders to move forward the policy recommendations
2. Determine what to do with MARSS 61 list of missing students
3. Increase awareness of existing programs and intervention best practices
 - Partner with national organizations like Attendance Works



<http://champions.uoregon.edu/sites/champions.wc-sites.uoregon.edu/files/speed%20mentoring%201.jpg>

Thank you! Any Questions?



<http://exploringedu.com/student-engagement/students-engaged/>

Appendix L: Summary for Client

Minnesota School Absenteeism and Truancy Policies

Research and Recommendations

Prepared by a Humphrey School of Public Affairs graduate student Capstone research group:
Charles Bruce · Kallen Hayes · Kristine Kosek · Nathan Miao · Shannon Thompson

The Problem:

This research project was commissioned by the Hennepin County Attorney Office's be@school truancy intervention program to explore whether Minnesota's 15-day drop statute is causing students to fall through cracks in the system. The 15-day drop statute mandates that students are dropped from a school's rolls once they have 15 consecutive unexcused absences. Some schools in Hennepin County have expressed concerns to be@school about the rule and whether changes are needed to be sure that students don't exit the educational system due to this rule and never return.

"If we changed the MN statute to 10 days or 20 days, it wouldn't change anything. Those kids are not here. I can't find them. I have more of a chance with the habitual truants so a statewide truancy prevention program should be the solution: school, judicial and county in a collaborative effort."

- Corey Knighton, Assistant Principal,
Red Wing High School

Research Findings and Conclusions:

- Unenrollment due to the 15-day drop policy is as much a statewide issue as it is a Hennepin County issue
- Minnesota's 15-day drop policy is on par with the national average of 12.2 for schools using the Average Daily Membership (ADMC) funding system.
- School officials believe what happens prior to the 15-day mark is more important: they are more concerned with truancy intervention measures.
- State statutes regarding truancy allow for local interpretation and management of truancy prevention measures.
- Truancy intervention programs are inconsistently administered across the state. Coordination between schools, districts, and counties vary widely, affecting the timeliness, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness of the intervention programs.

A SUMMARY OF STATUTES RELATING TO TRUANCY

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120A.22: Notes that schools "may" hire attendance officers, but these people must track absenteeism; allows for variations at the local level for unexcused absences.

120A.30: Requires students to be unenrolled after 15 unexcused absences.

120.34: Requires that a letter be sent home after three unexcused absences and lays out numerous truancy solutions using "may" language that establishes them as best practices instead of mandates.

- School officials are calling for increase in resources for truancy intervention programs and clearer guidance on absentee reporting guidelines
- Students who are unenrolled after 15 days are not easily tracked and there are no consistent measures in place to provide them social services and encourage their re-enrollment.
- The State of Minnesota Department of Education data system does not facilitate the sharing of student enrollment statuses between schools.
- Reporting practices are inconsistently applied, including proper coding of students who have been unenrolled or re-enrolled
- The process of requesting records from students' prior schools is not a reliable method to track student re-enrollment.
- The new MARSS 61 is proving helpful in cutting down each district's unenrollment list by allowing them to re-code students who have transferred, and give them time to focus on locating those students whose location is unknown by either the school or MDE.

"After 15 days of truancy, there is no funding stream to support the recoupment of students who have dropped out of school. I wish that the education community had the will and the financial support to find lost students and help them re-enroll in a school that best suits their needs."

- DR. CHARLENE MYKLEBUST,
DIRECTOR ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT,
INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT 287

Recommendations

1. Retain the 15-day drop rule (126C.05 Subd.8)
 - Changing the 15-day rule would be difficult and would require school systems to change other practices connected to it. The 15-day drop rule is not viewed as a root cause of students falling through the cracks.
2. Mandate that schools designate an attendance officer (120A.30)
 - Change current statutory language from 'may hire' to 'shall designate'
3. Mandate that counties and school districts collaborate to adopt intervention plans that clarify and create written policies.
 - Maintain local control while increasing awareness and consistency of programs that serve students exhibiting truant behavior, and, where resources allow, the students who have been dropped
4. Create oversight structure within MDE for approval of intervention plans
5. Improve data management and sharing via MARSS 61
 - Encourage school districts to use the report to update their unenrolled student list
 - Expand the report to include K-12, not just 9-12
 - Consider how the report can be used to assist in re-enrolling the students who are no longer in school