DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 2013

Annual Truancy Report

Submitted by: DC Public Schools Office of Youth Engagement

Introduction

In compliance with Section 38-203(i) of the District of Columbia Code, DC Public Schools is pleased to report to the Mayor and to the City Council of the District of Columbia a summary of the district's truancy data for school year 2012-2013. As required, the report includes:

- The number of minors, categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, who had unexcused absences for:
  - o 1-5 days;
  - o 6-10 days;
  - o 11-19 days; and
  - o 20 or more days.

- The work of the school-based student support teams in reducing unexcused absences, including:
  - o the number of students who were referred to a school-based student support team;
  - o the number of students who met with a school-based student support team;
  - o a summary of the action plans and strategies implemented by the school-based student support team to eliminate or ameliorate unexcused absences;
  - o a summary of the services utilized by students to reduce unexcused absences; and
  - o a summary of the common barriers to implementing the recommendations of the school-based student support team.

- The number of minors, categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, that the school reported to the Child and Family Services Agency pursuant to § 4-1321.02(a-1) and (a-2).

- The number of minors categorized by grade, or equivalent grouping for ungraded schools, that the school referred to the Court Social Services Division of the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for truancy; and

- The policy on absences used, including defined categories of valid excuses.

Overall, we have seen a notable reduction in truancy during the 2012-2013 school year, with 9% of our students categorized as "chronically truant"(having accumulated more than 15 unexcused absences), in comparison to 11% of students last year (our goal was 9%). This reduction is due, in large part, to our focus on collecting robust attendance data and increasing accountability for compliance with the truancy protocol and referral process; documenting the major the reasons for absences within the truancy conference process and following up with interventions and outreach to students and families; and leveraging critical support and resources from our sister agencies.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Schools are more focused on the integrity of the data collection process and compliance with referral requirements.

- We improved our collection of data on barriers to student attendance and have significantly more information than ever before about why students miss school.
- Earlier intervention is as critical to getting students back on track as focus on compliance with referral requirements.
- Data from our highest need schools indicates a need to focus on high schools, and 9th graders, in particular.
- Partnerships with other District agencies provide critical resources and direct support to students.

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Unexcused Absences for Minors

In SY12-13, 4,223 students accumulated more than 15 unexcused absences categorizing them as "chronically truant." DCPS' district-wide truancy rate was 9.21% for the 2012-2013 School Year[1]. In SY12-13, with the passage of the South Capitol Street Tragedy Amendment Act of 2012 and the Attendance Accountability Act of 2013, DCPS also began to track truancy at the 10-day threshold. Of the 42,618 compulsory age students enrolled at the end of the academic year, 6,930 students (16%) accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences.

A breakdown of the incidents of student truancy, as required by §38-203(i)(A) is included in the table below:

Grade Level	Enrolled	Unexcused Absences							
		# with 1-5	% with 1-5	# with 6-10	% with 6-10	# with 11-20	% with 11-20	# with 21+	% with 21+
K	4710	2169	46%	985	21%	339	7%	135	3%
1	4275	2087	49%	835	20%	249	6%	77	2%
2	3998	1996	50%	773	19%	254	6%	65	2%
3	3563	1751	49%	720	20%	201	6%	65	2%
4	3456	1705	49%	639	18%	212	6%	55	2%
5	3232	1597	49%	641	20%	186	6%	41	1%
6	2938	1218	41%	428	15%	115	4%	35	1%
7	2824	1265	45%	468	17%	121	4%	52	2%
8	2717	1253	46%	414	15%	125	5%	54	2%
9	5153	1010	20%	474	9%	425	8%	861	17%
10	3084	870	28%	406	13%	364	12%	483	16%
11	2668	624	23%	348	13%	312	12%	339	13%
12	2906	735	25%	375	13%	283	10%	231	8%
Total	42618	18280	43%	7506	18%	2903	7%	2493	6%

Highlights
- Incidents of truancy are considerable across grade levels.
- The high school grades represent the largest percentage of students showing severe truancy and deeper disengagement from school, as evidenced in the share of students who have been truant from school for 21 days or more – over one month of lost instructional time.

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[1] The DCPS truancy rate represents the share of the total registered population **(42,619 as of June 30, 2013**) that are compulsory school age (5-17 years old) and have accumulated 15 or more unexcused absences within the school year.

- When comparing grade-level truancy rates, the increase in severe truancy between eighth and ninth grade students is staggering. Only 2% of eighth graders ended the year with 21 or more unexcused absences compared with 17% of ninth graders.
- Overall, ninth grade students have the highest percentage of students in the most severe truancy category – 21 or more unexcused absences. Because there are more ninth graders in DCPS than any other secondary school grade, the truancy patterns of ninth graders disproportionately impact secondary attendance performance.

Student Support Teams

Student Support Teams (SSTs) are school-based, problem solving teams that provide teachers and families with suggestions for supporting individual and/or groups of students who present academic and/or behavioral difficulties. SST members—general education teachers, administrators, professional school counselors, support staff, families, and sometimes students—use a collaborative process to: (1) assess student academic and/or behavioral needs and identify positive goals; (2) recommend instructional strategies that the teacher can implement during a required six-week period (at a minimum); and (3) develop an implementation plan and monitor results. Teachers, families, and students can request SST assistance for issues related to learning difficulties, discipline problems, health concerns, and poor attendance.

In SY 12-13, 2619 students were referred to a school-based team for attendance; and 1757 students (67%) actually met with a team to address their attendance. There is still much to be done in clarifying the roles of the SSTs; strengthening their capacity to meet the timelines associated with attendance intervention and to provide meaningful follow-up; and to leverage the help of our partners to provide case management and support to students and families.

These teams implemented an array of strategies to eliminate or reduce the number of unexcused absences - including making calls and issuing attendance letters to families; conducting parent conferences and home visits; developing attendance contracts in collaboration with students and parents; providing school-based counseling and conducting daily check-ins with school staff; distribution of transportation tokens; referrals to community agencies and partners, such as mentoring programs; making referrals to CSFA and CSS; and also developing and offering attendance incentives and rewards programs,

The services students had access to included support from school-based and Department of Mental Health social workers and counselors, as well as community-based case management, and community-based health care providers.

The most common barriers to implementing the recommendations of the school-based student support teams were inconsistent distribution of resources across school levels; inadequate staffing to support implementation of truancy action plans and strategies; inconsistent scheduling of student-support team meetings; the absence of mandatory policies for attendance at the early childhood level; lack of full-time nurses, and lack of full-time student support team coordinators.

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) Referrals

This year, school staff referred 1722 students to the Child and Family Services Agency for educational neglect out of 2,736 students who were ages 5 - 13 and who accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences. This is a 63% compliance rate.

The table below illustrates the distribution of referrals across grade levels. The largest share of referrals was made to address absences in kindergarten. Kindergarten marks the first full year of compulsory school attendance. We recognize that early intervention and an emphasis on instilling a habit of strong school attendance in pre-school and pre-kindergarten is critical to addressing truancy at the early childhood level.

Figure 1 Educational Neglect Referrals by Grade
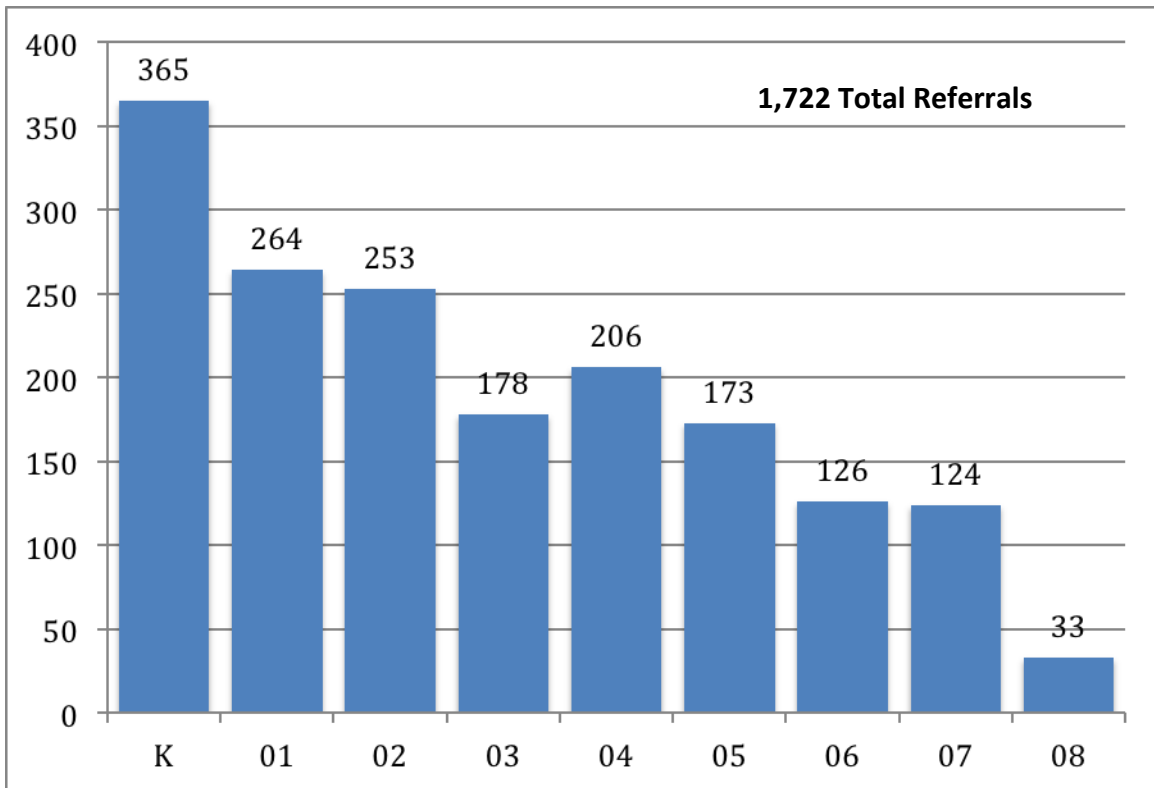
Court Social Services (CSS) Referrals

This year, school staff referred 897 students to the Court Social Services for educational neglect out of 1,578 students who are ages 14 - 18 who accumulated 25 or more unexcused absences. This is a 57% compliance rate.

The table below illustrates the distribution of referrals across grade levels. The largest share of referrals was made to address absences in ninth grade. For SY13-14, DCPS has made this a priority grade level for academic and attendance support.

Figure 2 Educational Neglect Referrals by Grade
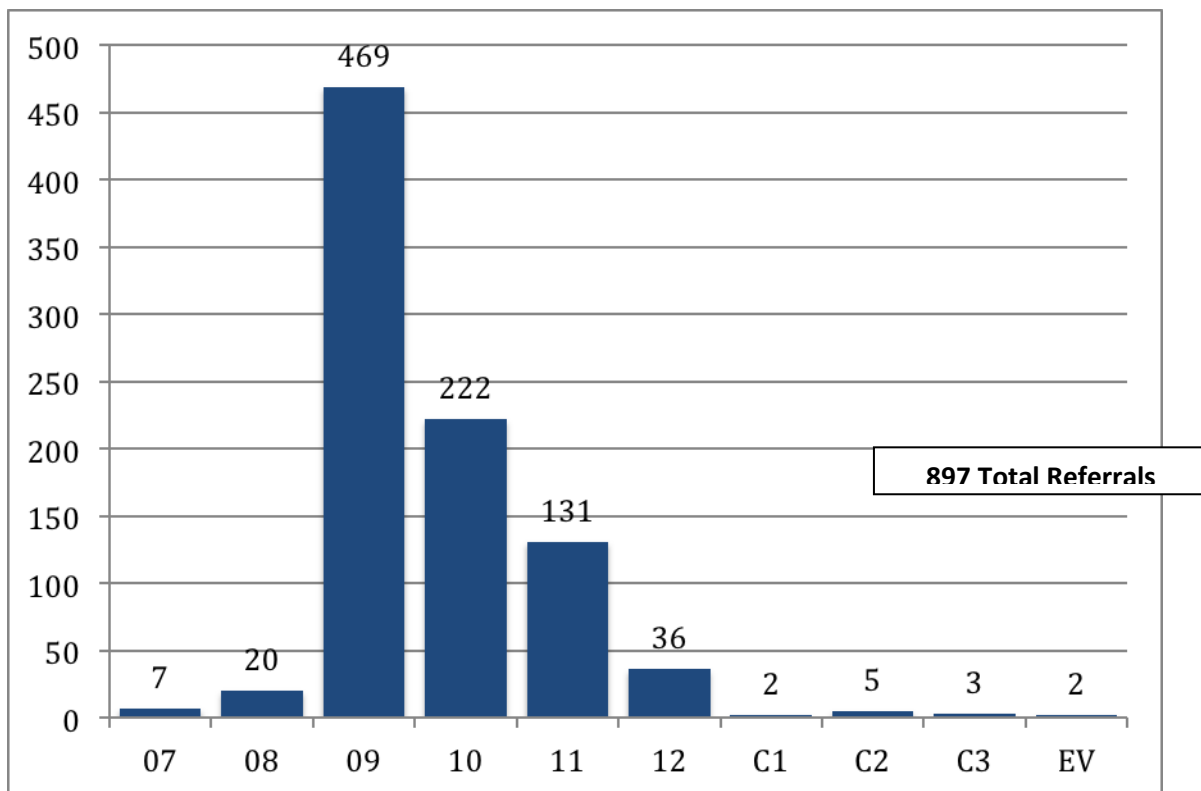
Valid Reasons for Absences

Lawful reasons for absence are articulated in DCMR Chapter 21. DC Public Schools abides by these regulations in determining valid absences. The following absences may be excused:

- Illness of the student or medical cause (a doctor's note is required for a student absent five or more days)
- Medical or dental appointment for the student
- Death in the student's immediate family
- Exclusion due to quarantine, contagious disease, etc.
- Necessity for a student to attend a judicial proceeding as a plaintiff, defendant, witness or juror
- Observance of a religious holiday
- Lawful suspension or exclusion from school by school authorities
- Temporary facility closings due to weather, unsafe conditions or other emergencies
- Absences to allow students to visit their parent or a legal guardian, who is in the military; immediately before, during, or after deployment
- Failure of DC to provide transportation where legally responsible
- Emergency or circumstances approved by LEA

When school-aged students are absent from school without a valid excuse from the above list, this absence is an unexcused absence regardless of whether the student has parental approval. Examples of unexcused absences include:

- Babysitting
- Shopping
- Doing errands
- Oversleeping
- Cutting classes
- Job hunting
- International travel (eg., multi-week family vacations or visits to native countries for holidays, family events, etc.)