



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

January 6, 2025

Questions for Steve Neff, Director, Pupil Personnel and Attendance Services, Montgomery County Public Schools for January 16, 2025 Meeting

A. Defining and Measuring Chronic Absenteeism

1. How is chronic absence defined? We understand that students can miss 10% of school days (18 days in a year) without being considered chronically absent.
2. Can you provide a demographic and geographic breakdown of chronic absenteeism?
 - a. Can you highlight any specific high absenteeism schools in Mid-County?
 - b. How big is the problem? What are the numbers and percentages for kids who:
 - i. Are there to learn with no issues
 - ii. Are chronically absent
 - iii. Are trying but need help to be successful.

B. Policies and Enforcement

3. Can you walk us through the process of what happens when a child has had a certain number of absences?
 4. How is MCPS enforcing the existing policy regarding chronic absenteeism?
 5. How do you interact with police to work with kids who have already left MCPS property during school hours?
 6. What consequences do students face for chronic absenteeism as it relates to graduation and credits?
 - o MCPS tells staff they want to separate academics from attendance. Older policy had Loss of Credit (LOC) for students who missed class too often. Three unexcused tardies counted as one absence. Warning letters were sent, and students lost semester credit past a threshold. Now, Attendance Intervention Plans (AIPs) are made, and students meet with administrators and teachers to discuss solutions. There are no repercussions for skipping class.
 7. Is there any minimum requirement for attendance to receive credit for a course?
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C. Resources and Support

8. What resources are being put into addressing chronic absenteeism? How much of the budget is allocated to address this issue?
 9. What is the role of counselors in chronic absenteeism, and will there be more resources added to counseling programs?
 10. Could MCPS hire one attendance-focused counselor for each high school?
 - a. Counselors are expected to know students well, keeping the same students throughout high school. Teachers are responsible for teaching and grading but are also expected to make calls home. This overload, coupled with large class sizes, makes it challenging to track attendance. MCPS would need to hire many more counselors, starting with the schools with the biggest absenteeism problems. Ideally, these counselors would be bilingual to better engage with families.
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D. Attendance Tracking and Technology

11. How are patterns of absences tracked?
 12. When does the school get notice of chronic absenteeism and start certain actions to address it?
 13. Can MCPS add more tracking functions? For example:
 - o MCPS has used various software systems for reporting attendance. Currently, all teachers can see if a student has attended classes that day, but no coordination happens. Robocalls go to households, and teachers are encouraged to make their own calls home. Could the system flag truancy? For instance, if a student is absent three or more times from any class, counselors, teachers, and families could receive an automated notification.
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E. Attendance Policies and Changes

14. Can there be a stricter policy regarding attendance?
 - o Before the pandemic, students arriving more than 15 minutes late were marked absent for the day. Now, students arriving 30 minutes late are marked present, even though they miss most of the class. This change started in Spring 2024. Is MCPS considering a return to the stricter policy?
 15. How does MCPS treat excused versus unexcused absences?
 - o At a professional development session in October at WJHS, truancy rates were shown by demographics. Truancy was similar between white, Latino, and African American students. However, white students' absences were generally excused, while students of color had many unexcused absences.
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F. Stakeholder Engagement

16. How do you bring in stakeholders to address chronic absenteeism?
 - a. What are the strategies and expectations at the school and teacher levels?
 - b. How is MCPS working with parents to address the issue?
 - c. Have you asked students (through focus groups) why they are chronically absent?
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G. School-Specific and System-Wide Concerns

17. Can you specifically talk about Kennedy High School and what is being done to address absenteeism there?
 18. Do schools still allow for open lunch?
 19. Is the school resource officer program still in place?
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H. Broader System Challenges

20. It now appears that the collective suite of issues (absenteeism, culture, drugs, English as a second language, etc.) is overwhelming school faculty.
 - a. What is the County's vision for the future of MCPS education quality improvement and sustainment?
 - b. How will these issues be addressed, and current gaps closed?
 - c. What is your timeline for achieving this? Are there milestones or key decision points?
 - d. How is MCPS performing against these plans?
 - e. Are there metrics to illustrate the challenge's extent and MCPS's mitigation steps?
 - f. What are MCPS's solutions to these challenges?
 - g. What are the root causes of chronic absenteeism?
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I. Creative and Future Solutions

21. What creative solutions is MCPS exploring to tackle chronic absenteeism?
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