Student Attendance and Truancy Legislative Study Group

Final Report to the Minnesota Legislature

December 2024

Executive Summary

The Student Attendance and Truancy Legislative Study Group ("Study Group") was established in 2024 by Minnesota Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 1, Section 21. The Study Group was created to make recommendations to the relevant legislative committees in order to increase student attendance and reduce truancy, particularly in the wake of the 2020 Covid Pandemic and the subsequent rise in truancy rates across both Minnesota and nationwide. The Study Group is required to submit its recommendations in a report by the end of 2024.

The Study Group hosted meetings both in-person and online via Zoom to receive feedback from the Department of Education, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, tribal officials, county officials, school boards, school administrators, parents, and students from across the state. Testimony and discussion raised a myriad of issues and current programs tackling student attendance.

From this review, the Study Group recommended 1) the CP006 Draft Legislation in Appendix A and 2) eight topics of exploration for the Legislature:

1. Explore Consistent Definitions around Attendance
2. Explore Coordination Among State and Local Agencies
3. Explore Community Engagement - Cultural/Lived Experience School Credit
4. MDE Recommendation – Explore Increased Data on Attendance
5. Explore Increased Data Sharing Between School Districts and County Governments
6. Explore School Staff Dedicated to Truancy Reduction
7. Explore Transportation of Students to and from School
8. Explore Community Support

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Membership

Minnesota Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 1, Section 21.

Subd. 2. **Members.** (a) The legislative study group on student attendance and truancy consists of:

(1) four duly elected and currently serving members of the house of representatives, two appointed by the speaker of the house and two appointed by the house minority leader; and

(2) four duly elected and currently serving senators, two appointed by the senate majority leader and two appointed by the senate minority leader.

(b) The appointments must be made by June 15, 2024, and expire December 31, 2024.

(c) If a vacancy occurs, the leader of the caucus in the house of representatives or senate to which the vacating study group member belonged must fill the vacancy.

Representative Heather Keeler, Chair

Appointed by: Speaker of the House

Representative Ben Bakeberg

Appointed by: House Minority Leader

Representative Bryan Lawrence

Appointed by: House Minority Leader

Representative Bianca Virnig

Appointed by: Speaker of the House

Senator Mary Kunesh, Vice-Chair

Appointed by: Senate Majority Leader

Senator Steve Cwodzinski

Appointed by: Senate Majority Leader

Senator Robert Farnsworth

Appointed by: Senate Minority Leader

Senator Michael Kreun

Appointed by: Senate Minority Leader

Enabling Legislation

Minnesota Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 1, Section 21.

Subd. 3. **Duties.** (a) The legislative study group must study and evaluate ways to increase student attendance and reduce truancy. In preparing the recommendations, the group must consider the following:

(1) current statutory requirements relating to student attendance and truancy;

(2) currently available attendance data and additional data that would help schools and policy makers understand and reduce absenteeism;

(3) the effect of school programs and strategies to improve attendance;

(4) the role of school principals in addressing student absenteeism;

(5) the role of the Department of Education in addressing student absenteeism;

(6) the role of counties in addressing truancy; and

(7) how truant students are tracked across county lines.

(b) The study group must identify and include in its report any statutory changes needed to implement the study group recommendations.

Overview of Meetings

First Meeting- July 29, 2024

The Study Group elected Representative Heather Keeler as Chair. Members of the Study Group and staff introduced themselves. Staff from the Legislative Coordinating Commission provided an overview of the Study Group's enabling legislation. Members of the audience introduced themselves.

Second Meeting- August 12, 2024

The Study Group elected Senator Mary Kunesh as Vice Chair. The Study Group heard brief introductions from 23 different stakeholders from EdAllies, Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Bloomington Public Schools, Sanneh Foundation, Association of Metropolitan School Districts, Columbia Heights Public Schools, Minnesota School Social Workers Association, students at Prior Lake High School, Savage Police Department, Minnesota School Boards Association, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals / Minnesota Elementary Principals Association, Minnesota Alliance with Youth, Minnesota Department of Education, Multicultural Autism Action Network, Scott County, and Playworks Minnesota.

Third Meeting- August 26, 2024

The Study Group heard brief introductions from 23 different stakeholders from Mitchell Hamline School of Law, Olmsted County, Polk County, East Grand Forks Public Schools including several students, White Earth Band of Ojibwe, Bug O Nay Ge Shig School, Brown County, Minnesota State University Mankato, Otter Tail County, Northfield Public Schools, Northfield Promise, Red Wing Public Schools, BARR Center, Detroit Lakes High School, Anoka Hennepin School District, Saint Paul Public Schools, School Nurse Organization of Minnesota, and Bloomington Public Schools.

Fourth Meeting- September 9, 2024

The Study Group heard testimony from several students from BlueSky Online; Camden High School, Minneapolis; Southwest High School, Minneapolis; Fergus Falls Area Learning Center; and Duluth East High School. The Study Group then heard a presentation by EdAllies going over student attendance data in Minnesota and the issues around using it.

Fifth Meeting- September 23, 2024

The Minnesota Department of Education presented to the Study Group about its role in collecting student attendance data. The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families provided a brief introduction about its creation and its role in the issues around student truancy. The Education Commission of the States presented about efforts other states have taken to reduce student truancy in the wake of the pandemic. The members of the Study Group concluded the meeting with a discussion about their takeaways and their future aims.

Sixth Meeting- October 7, 2024

The Study Group heard a presentation from Scott County and Shakopee Public Schools about the work they are doing together to reduce student truancy. The Study Group then invited the stakeholders in attendance to join the table for a discussion about what first legislative changes are

needed to deal with student attendance that can be done with bipartisan support in the 2025 legislative session.

Seventh Meeting- October 21, 2024

The Study Group discussed possible avenues for dealing with student attendance and voted to move forward with recommendations in eight subject areas for its preliminary report:

1. Consistent Definitions
2. Coordination Among State and Local Agencies
3. Community Engagement - Cultural/Lived Experience School Credit
4. MDE Recommendation – Increased Data on Attendance
5. Increased Data Sharing Between School Districts and County Governments
6. School Staff Dedicated to Truancy Reduction
7. Transportation of Students to and from School
8. Community Support

Eighth Meeting- November 18, 2024

The Study Group heard feedback on the preliminary report from a school social worker, EdAllies, the Pacer Coalition, Minnesota Youth Council, Hennepin County Attorney's Office Be@School Program, the Minnesota School Board Association, Nicollet County Commission, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association, Minnesota Disability Law Center at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, and a Twice Exceptional Advocate.

Ninth Meeting- December 2, 2024

The Study Group heard from the school districts involved in the Student Attendance Pilot Program (Minnesota Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 1, Section 21): Minneapolis, Columbia Heights, Red Lake, Sauk Rapids-Rice, Mankato, Moorhead, Cook County, Windom, Burnsville, Rochester, Northfield, and Chisholm about the Pilot Program's current work.

Tenth Meeting- December 16, 2024

The Study Group approved recommendations for its final report. 1) the CP006 Draft Legislation (*see* Appendix A) and 2) eight topics of exploration for the Legislature:

1. Explore Consistent Definitions around Attendance
2. Explore Coordination Among State and Local Agencies
3. Explore Community Engagement - Cultural/Lived Experience School Credit
4. MDE Recommendation – Explore Increased Data on Attendance
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Eleventh Meeting – December 20, 2024

The Study Group approved the final report.

Recommendations

The Study Group adopted two recommendations: 1) the CP006 Draft Legislation in Appendix A and 2) eight topics of exploration for the Legislature:

1. **Explore Consistent Definitions around Attendance**
2. **Explore Coordination Among State and Local Agencies**
3. **Explore Community Engagement - Cultural/Lived Experience School Credit**
4. **MDE Recommendation – Explore Increased Data on Attendance**
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8. **Explore Community Support**

Staff Contributions

This report was compiled by LCC staff members, Nick Nigro and Meena Xiong, and would not have been possible without contributions of staff members from the Senate, House of Representatives and Legislative Coordinating Commission.