

# Truancy FAQs

## **What is wrong with our current truancy laws?**

Michigan has no standard definition for chronic absenteeism or truancy for schools. As a result, rules vary from district to district, there is insufficient accounting of missed seat time, and students are often suspended or expelled without ever addressing what causes them to miss school in the first place.

## **Why should the truancy law be changed?**

Punishing students who fail to come to school by sending them home is counterproductive and contributes to lower graduation and higher delinquency rates.

Elementary school students who miss school are more likely to struggle academically and eventually to drop out of school altogether. The decision to drop out is a dangerous one for the student. Dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves.

Our communities and nation also suffer from the dropout epidemic due to the loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services.

## **What will the changes mean for schools?**

The proposed legislation would define “chronic absenteeism” and “truancy,” which are now categorized differently and treated differently from district to district. Schools would have consistent definitions and guidelines for dealing with truant students with preventative and corrective measures so that the response to skipping school is not just sending students home, where they miss even more class time.

## **What are the benefits to changing these laws?**

When people think of truancy they think of kids making a decision to run with the wrong crowd. Instead, most truancy is the result of circumstances the kid can't control such as they are babysitting younger siblings, they don't have a coat, or they are being bullied.

The proposed changes to the law are meant to address what actually causes the children to miss school in the first place so that we can enable them for long-term success.

## **Are truancy issues problems in my community?**

An estimated 250,000 Michigan youth are not enrolled in school, are not working, and do not have a GED or high school diploma. Michigan ranks 37th in the nation for graduation rates and is continuing to trend downwards. Of the 8,800 people sentenced to prison in Michigan in 2016, 49% did not have a GED or high school diploma. 72% of Michigan inmates read at less than a 3rd grade level.

## **Will these changes save my district money?**

Every student a district loses is worth roughly \$7,200 in annual per pupil funding. Every prisoner Michigan gains each year costs about \$37,500. An average prisoner spends 4 years in prison costing a total of \$150,000 each. Michigan currently houses more than 400 juveniles less than eighteen years old.