

1 H.930

2 Introduced by Committee on Education

3 Date:

4 Subject: Education; attendance and discipline; chronic absenteeism; truancy

5 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to make
6 amendments to 16 V.S.A. chapter 25 to define chronic absenteeism and require
7 the Agency of Education to develop a model policy to address chronic
8 absenteeism.

9 An act relating to addressing and preventing chronic absenteeism

10 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

11 Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. chapter 25, subchapter 3 is amended to read:

12 Subchapter 3. Compulsory Attendance

13 § 1120. DEFINITIONS

14 As used in this chapter:

15 (1) “Absence” means a student who is, for at least half the school day
16 when school is open, not physically on school grounds or who is not receiving
17 or attending educational, cocurricular, or athletic services or programming
18 elsewhere pursuant to a program or plan approved by:

1 (A) the district, if the student is enrolled in a public school; or

2 (B) an approved independent school if the student is enrolled in an
3 approved independent school

4 (2) “Chronic absenteeism” means a student who is absent for any reason
5 for 10 percent or more of a district’s or approved independent school’s student
6 attendance days within one school year, regardless of whether the absences are
7 considered excused or unexcused.

8 (3) “Excused absence” means an absence that is approved by the
9 superintendent or designee, or the head of school or designee for an approved
10 independent school, pursuant to section 1123 of this chapter, either before or
11 after the date or dates of the student’s absence. Excused absences shall include
12 days of in- or out-of-school suspension.

13 (4) “Parent or guardian” shall have their ordinary meanings; provided,
14 however, that they shall also mean a student in the following situations:

15 (A) the student has reached the age of majority;

16 (B) the student is an independent student as that term is defined under
17 subsection 1075(h) of this chapter; or

18 (C) the student qualifies as an “unaccompanied youth” under the
19 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 11431–11435.

20 (5) “Truancy” means a student who accumulates 20 or more unexcused
21 absences either within the same school year or within a district’s or approved

1 independent school's last 175 consecutive student attendance days, regardless
2 of whether the absences were within the same school year.

3 (6) "Unexcused absence" means any student absence that does not fit
4 one of the categories of excused absences. Failure of the parent or guardian to
5 provide justification for the absence if requested by the superintendent or the
6 head of school for an approved independent school shall also constitute an
7 unexcused absence.

8 § 1121. ATTENDANCE BY CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE REQUIRED

9 ~~A person having the control~~ The parent or guardian of a child between ~~the~~
10 ~~ages of~~ six and 16 years of age shall cause the child to attend a public school,
11 an approved or recognized independent school, an approved education
12 program, or a home study program for the full number of days for which that
13 school is held, unless the child:

14 (1) per medical recommendation, is mentally or physically unable so to
15 attend; ~~or~~

16 (2) has completed the ~~tenth~~ 10th grade; ~~or~~

17 (3) is excused by the superintendent ~~or a majority of the school directors~~
18 or designee, or the head of school for an approved independent school or
19 designee, as provided in this chapter; or

1 (4) is enrolled in and attending a postsecondary school, as defined in
2 subdivision 176(b)(1) of this title, which is approved or accredited in Vermont
3 or another state.

4 § 1122. STUDENTS UNDER 6 AND OVER 16 YEARS OF AGE

5 ~~A person having the control~~ The parent or guardian of a child who is under
6 six years of age or over 16 years of age who allows the child to become
7 ~~enrolled~~ enrolls the child in kindergarten through grade 12 in a public school or
8 approved independent school shall ~~cause~~ ensure that the child ~~to attend~~ attends
9 the school continually for the full number of ~~the~~ school days of the term in
10 which ~~he or she~~ the child is enrolled, ~~unless the child is mentally or physically~~
11 ~~unable to continue or is excused in writing by the superintendent or a majority~~
12 ~~of the school directors~~. In case of such enrollment, the ~~person and the teacher,~~
13 ~~child,~~ the parent or guardian and the superintendent, and school directors or
14 designee or the head of school for an approved independent school or designee
15 shall be under the laws and subject to the penalties relating to the attendance of
16 children between ~~the ages of~~ six and 16 years of age.

17 § 1123. ATTENDANCE SCHOOL ABSENCE MAY BE EXCUSED

18 (a) The superintendent of a public school or designee or the head of school
19 of an approved independent school or designee may excuse, ~~in writing, any~~
20 ~~student from attending the school for a definite time, but for not more than ten~~

1 ~~consecutive school days and only for emergencies or for absence from town a~~
2 student's absence for all or part of the school day for the following reasons:

3 (1) physical or mental illness of the student;

4 (2) family emergency or death in the family;

5 (3) quarantine in the home;

6 (4) student's medical, dental, mental health, or substance use treatment
7 appointment;

8 (5) family observance of religious holidays;

9 (6) legal activities, such as a student's court appearance;

10 (7) driving examinations;

11 (8) college or other postsecondary program visitations;

12 (9) legal or administrative proceedings related to the placement of the
13 student by the State;

14 (10) absences due to transitions in the student's living situation as a
15 result of the student experiencing homelessness;

16 (11) pre-enlistment or deployment activities of the student or the
17 student's parent or legal guardian; or

18 (12) other reasons not specified in subdivisions (1) through (11) of this
19 subsection with approval of the superintendent of a public school or designee
20 or the head of school of an approved independent school or designee.

1 (b) ~~The superintendent of an elementary school held for more than 175~~
2 ~~school days in a school year may excuse, in writing, a student of the school~~
3 ~~from attending more than 175 days or designee or the head of school for an~~
4 ~~approved independent school or designee may excuse a student from~~
5 ~~attendance for preplanned family commitments or activities of which the~~
6 ~~school has been notified in advance. Preapproved absences shall not exceed 10~~
7 ~~cumulative school days in each school year.~~

8 (c) The superintendent or designee or the head of school for an approved
9 independent school or designee may request justification for an absence.

10 § 1124. RESPONSE TO CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

11 (a) The Agency of Education, in consultation with the Vermont School
12 Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, the Vermont
13 Principals' Association, the Vermont Independent Schools Association, and
14 the Vermont School Counselor Association, shall develop, and review at least
15 annually, a model policy on the prevention of chronic absenteeism and truancy.
16 This policy shall include a template for documentation of actions taken
17 according to the policy to address the absence, which shall constitute the
18 truancy reporting protocol. The policy shall also include a template for
19 standard documentation to be provided to parents or guardians pursuant to
20 section 1127 of this chapter.

1 ~~the school~~ accumulates 20 or more unexcused absences within either the same
2 school year or within the last 175 consecutive student attendance days, and
3 when a student who is under six years of age or at least 16 years of age
4 becomes enrolled in a public school in kindergarten through grade 12 and fails
5 ~~to attend~~ accumulates 20 or more unexcused absences either within the same
6 school year or within the last 175 consecutive student attendance days, the
7 ~~teacher or principal~~ shall notify ~~the truant officer and either~~ the superintendent
8 ~~or the school board, unless the teacher or principal is satisfied that the student~~
9 ~~is absent on account of illness.~~ For Vermont resident students, the head of
10 school of an approved independent school or designee shall notify the
11 superintendent of the student's district of residence. Upon review of the
12 truancy reporting protocol, the superintendent shall notify the truant officer and
13 Centralized Intake and Emergency Services of the Department for Children
14 and Families' Family Services Division.

15 § 1127. NOTICE AND COMPLAINT BY TRUANT OFFICER; PENALTY

16 (a) The truant officer, upon receiving the notice and truancy reporting
17 protocol provided in section 1126 of this title, shall inquire into the cause of
18 the nonattendance of the child. ~~If he or she~~ the truant officer finds that the
19 ~~child is absent without cause~~ child's absences are not excusable under section
20 1123 of this chapter, the truant officer shall give written notice to the ~~person~~
21 ~~having the control of the child that the child is absent from school without~~

1 ~~cause and shall also notify that person to cause the child to attend school~~
2 ~~regularly thereafter~~ parent or guardian that the parent or guardian must comply
3 with the obligations of section 1122 of this chapter.

4 (b) ~~When, after receiving notice, a person fails, without legal excuse, to~~
5 ~~cause a child to attend school as required by this chapter, he or she shall be~~
6 ~~fined not more than \$1,000.00 pursuant to subsection (c) of this section~~ If the
7 parent or guardian continues to fail, without legal excuse, to cause a child to
8 attend school as required by this chapter after having received the written
9 notice required pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the truant officer shall
10 enter a complaint to the State's Attorney of the county and shall provide a
11 statement of the evidence and truancy reporting protocol upon which the
12 complaint is based.

13 (c) ~~The truant officer shall enter a complaint to the State's Attorney of the~~
14 ~~county and shall provide a statement of the evidence upon which the complaint~~
15 ~~is based.~~ The State's Attorney shall may prosecute the person or may file a
16 child in need of supervision petition in accordance with 33 V.S.A. § 5309. If a
17 criminal information is filed under this section, a person shall not be fined
18 more than \$1,000.00 if, after receiving notice, a person fails, without legal
19 excuse, to cause a child to attend school as required by this chapter. In the a
20 prosecution, the complaint, information, or indictment shall be deemed
21 sufficient if it states that the respondent (naming the respondent) having the

1 ~~control of a child of school age~~ parent or guardian (specifying if the applicable
2 person is a parent or guardian and naming the person) of the child (naming the
3 child) neglects to send that child to a public school or an approved or
4 recognized independent school or a home study program as required by law.

5 § 1128. ~~LEGAL PUPIL TAKEN TO SCHOOL; NONRESIDENT CHILD~~
6 ~~LIVING IN DISTRICT~~

7 ~~(a) A superintendent may and the truant officer shall stop a child between~~
8 ~~the ages of six and 16 years or a child 16 years of age or over and enrolled in~~
9 ~~public school, wherever found during school hours, and shall, unless such child~~
10 ~~is excused or exempted from school attendance, take the child to the school~~
11 ~~that she or he should attend.~~

12 ~~(b) A child of legal school age who is not exempt from school attendance~~
13 ~~and who has not finished the elementary school course and is living in a~~
14 ~~district other than the place of legal residence shall, with the school board's~~
15 ~~approval, be admitted immediately to a school in the district where he or she is~~
16 ~~found. If the child is not admitted to school, then immediate action shall be~~
17 ~~taken by the truant officer to cause the return of the child to the district of his~~
18 ~~or her residence. [Repealed.]~~

19 § 1129. JURISDICTION OF NONRESIDENTS

20 The superintendent of a school in which a nonresident pupil is enrolled and
21 a truant officer having jurisdiction of the pupils in such school shall have the

1 same authority and jurisdiction over such nonresident pupil and the ~~person~~
2 ~~having the control of such pupil~~ parent or guardian as they have over resident
3 pupils and the ~~persons having control~~ parent or guardian of such pupils.

4 Sec. 2. 16 V.S.A. § 1162 is amended to read:

5 § 1162. SUSPENSION OR EXPULSION OF STUDENTS

6 * * *

7 (e) A public school or an approved independent school may provide access
8 to alternative education, such as tutoring, instructional materials, and
9 assignments to a student during any period of suspension of three or more
10 days. A public school or an approved independent school may provide access
11 to alternative education, such as tutoring, instructional materials, and
12 assignments to a student who has been expelled, except that the school shall
13 provide educational access to the extent otherwise required by law.

14 Sec. 3. PREVENTION OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM; AGENCY OF
15 EDUCATION POLICY; IMPLEMENTATION

16 (a) On or before March 15, 2027, the Agency of Education shall submit a
17 written update on the efforts made to develop the model policy required
18 pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 1124. The Agency shall include the most recent draft
19 model policy and most recent draft templates required to be developed as part
20 of the model policy.

1 (b) The Agency of Education shall adopt and publish the model policy
2 required pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 1124 on or before July 1, 2027.

3 (c) School boards and the governing bodies of approved independent
4 schools shall adopt and implement a chronic absenteeism policy as required by
5 16 V.S.A. § 1124 on or before July 1, 2028.

6 Sec. 4. REPEAL

7 16 V.S.A. § 1076 (penalties) is repealed.

8 Sec. 5. HOME STUDY PROGRAM; ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS;

9 AGENCY OF EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

10 On or before December 1, 2026, the Agency of Education shall submit a
11 written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education with
12 recommendations for updates to Vermont's home study program law to
13 improve oversight of home study programs and to ensure home study
14 participants' compliance with attendance requirements.

15 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

16 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.