An excerpt from: The Uniform Data Set: a Guide to Measures for the Uniform Management Information and Reporting System

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2. TRUANCY RATES

Sec. 4112 of *NCLB* establishes UMIRS and requires that states collect and report data on truancy rates at the school level. These data are to be available for each individual school in the state to provide comparative information to the public. SEAs work with LEAs to ensure the collection and reporting of data necessary to meet this requirement. This UDS guide provides definitions and procedures relevant to one measure of truancy rate that is sufficient to meet the requirement of *NCLB*. This section provides the UDS guidelines for collecting data necessary for a standardized measure of truancy rates and for reporting rates on individual schools to the public.

Definitions Relevant to Truancy Rate

The UDS provides a standardized measure for collecting data and reporting information on the truancy rate at individual schools. Currently there is substantial variation in the definition of what constitutes truancy across states, including differences in the definition of the behaviors that will be considered incidents of *truancy*, differences in the standards of the frequency of those behaviors that will result in labeling a student a *truant*, and even differences in the decision-makers who decide what definition of truancy will be used in reporting truancy rates. This section provides standard definitions that are a necessary element regarding the provision of guidelines for collecting and reporting a standardized truancy rate across schools. These definitions recognize that some flexibility in the detailed definition of events is necessary and appropriate to a system that focuses on local reporting. The following definitions underlie the UDS measure of truancy rate.

- *Truancy.* The UDS definition of truancy is *a pattern of repeated unexcused absences from compulsory education*. Under this definition, truancy is not a single event, but a pattern of incidents of unexcused absence, and, therefore, the definition of truancy requires a distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

- *Unexcused absence.* Distinctions between excused and unexcused absences are routinely made by LEAs nationwide, and excused and unexcused absence is routinely differentiated in school records. While there is minor variation in the ways in which a particular absence will be categorized across LEAs and schools, the UDS definition

is based on the established local definition of *unexcused* and counts unexcused absences as incidents of truant behavior only when the student is absent for the entire school day. In summary, an unexcused absence is counted toward identifying a student as truant when it meets the local definition of unexcused and is for an entire school day.

- *Truant.* The UDS measure of truancy described in this section is based on the number of truant students in the school population. A truant is *a student who has accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences in a school year.* This threshold distinguishes between students who rarely have an unexcused absence and students who have a persistent or chronic pattern of unexcused absences.

- *School population.* The size of the school population is determined by the count of enrolled students on Oct. 1 of any given school year or some other date determined by the state.

Summary of UDS Guidelines for Measuring Truancy Rate

Guidance for the UDS measurement of truancy rate is summarized in table 1. This table lists the UMIRS requirement for truancy rates, a definition, levels at which data must be collected and reported, the reporting period, uniform measures for purposes of this guide, and computation method.

Table 1. UMIRS truancy rate: UDS description of relevant factors for UMIRS reporting

Factors	Description
UMIRS requirement	The UMIRS provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* require that states collect and report data on *truancy rates* at the school level.
Definition	*Truancy rate:* Rate of students who have 10 or more unexcused absences per year per 100 students, with the definition of unexcused absence based on local definition.
Level at which data must be collected	School record data on individual students.
Level at which data are reported	Individual schools.
Period of reporting	Annual reporting of rates for the school year.
Uniform measures	School-level rate (per 100 students) of truants in an academic year.
Computation steps	1. Using school attendance records, identify the number of days of unexcused absence for each student enrolled in the relevant academic year. 2. Identify each student that meets the UDS criteria for being a truant, i.e., 10 or more full days of unexcused absence during the school year. 3. Identify the size of the school population for the relevant school year. 4. Apply the following formula to compute the truancy rate for individual schools for the school year: $$\text{Truancy rate} = \frac{\text{Number of truants at school Y in year Z}}{\text{Count of student membership for school Y in year Z}} \times 100$$

Considerations and Caveats for Measuring Truancy Rates

This section summarizes major issues to be considered regarding the collection and reporting of information on truancy rates. The issues are based largely on facilitated discussions among state representatives at the regional meetings held to gain their input and insights. Issues include hurdles relating to variation in definitions of truancy as well as differences in data systems across states. Understanding the background and resolution of these issues in UDS guidelines will facilitate application of the guidelines with as much accuracy as possible.

Variable state and local definitions relevant to truancy. State and local definitions of truancy vary widely. For example, the definition of unexcused absence, threshold numbers of unexcused absence that define truancy, the number of minutes or class periods that a student can miss before attendance for the day is coded as an unexcused absence, and the degree to which LEAs have discretion in applying a common definition vary. The UDS provides a standard definition that can be computed notwithstanding variation in specific local definitions. Because UMIRS requirements are oriented to providing information at the building and district levels, the UDS definitions do not include uniform definition at this level of detail (e.g., the precise criteria for unexcused absence). To the extent that states use more standardized definitions, truancy data will be more comparable.

School attendance record systems. To support accurate computation of the UDS measure of truancy rate, a school record system must have the capacity to a) accurately track absences for individual students, b) indicate whether each absence is excused or unexcused, and c) provide information on whether the absence was for a full day. If the record system does not provide any of these critical data elements, it will require revision to fully meet the UDS guidelines.

Definition based on the school year. The UDS guidelines describe measures that are annual (i.e., calculated at the end of the school year). States may wish to identify truants sooner (perhaps when they could most benefit from intervention); to do so, it will be necessary to keep an ongoing periodic or continuing count of unexcused absences for students. This capacity requires decisions on when data should be prepared (e.g., monthly) and how students who are at risk for meeting the annual criteria of 10 days of unexcused absence might be identified (e.g., experiencing unexcused absences at a rate that would exceed the annual criterion within the school year).

Calculation of school student population size (enrollment). To calculate the UDS measure, schools must compute the size of the school population. Any system that provides a calculation of the average expected number of students in attendance for each day of the reporting period will meet this need. For the sake of consistency within states, the same estimation procedure should be used across LEAs and all schools in the state. One approach is taking a *point estimate* by counting student enrollment on the same day throughout the state, such as the school day closest to Oct. 1. Other systems for calculating average student enrollment on more data points (e.g., average of daily estimates) will provide more accurate estimates.