

# Truancy: A Call to Action

## *Report and Recommendations to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable*

Truancy Workgroup  
May 2010





May 27, 2010

To: The Pennsylvania Children's Roundtable,

We are pleased to introduce this report on behalf of the Pennsylvania Children's Roundtable Truancy Workgroup. It represents many months of hard work and the collective wisdom of workgroup members who, despite their diverse affiliations, are deeply committed to the common goal of improving outcomes for children in the child welfare system and specifically, to combating the urgent problem of truancy in Pennsylvania.

The recommendations focus on *collaboration*, an *enhanced school culture* and climate around education, *prevention and early intervention* and creative *partnerships which utilize data* to inform decisions and *build sustainable resources*. This report does not propose a 'one size fits all' truancy elimination program. Instead, it reflects the Workgroup's firm belief that a comprehensive, community-based effort incorporating the five core elements (above) to create a culture which prioritizes regular school attendance is the best approach.

The Truancy Workgroup began its work with a recognition and acknowledgment of the good work done in Pennsylvania to date. Our approach has been to build upon that work and to seize the opportunity at hand, to address truancy. The current leadership of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, through its Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), the Children's Roundtable and its partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, provides a vehicle for real leadership in this area which did not heretofore exist. Additionally, as we approach the transition to a new administration in Pennsylvania, including the Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, it is the Workgroup's sincere desire that the Court, OCFC and the Children's Roundtable will continue to provide strong leadership to ensure that truancy remains a priority. This is particularly critical, given the current economic climate and the realities of working to improve systems with fewer resources. The Workgroup urges leadership at all levels to answer the call to action set forth herein, and to work collectively, creatively and swiftly to address truancy.

The proposals are a product of the exemplary work and dedication of the members of the Workgroup, whose expertise and experience shaped them. What began as a dialogue based on individual perspectives and experiences evolved into a strong consensus in support of a collaborative, community-based model. Throughout the process of debating difficult issues, the Workgroup members modeled the leadership, respect for each other and collaboration that communities should strive for as they also tackle these issues.

We offer our sincere thanks to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the Children's Roundtable for convening the Workgroup, and to the OCFC staff who both supported and sustained our work. Finally, our thanks to the many organizations and individuals that have offered their guidance and support for these recommendations.



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## **About the Pennsylvania Children's Roundtable Truancy Workgroup**

The Truancy Workgroup, commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable, was formally launched in December 2009. The charge of the Workgroup was to gather information about critical systemic issues in Pennsylvania regarding truancy, identify nationally recognized and Pennsylvania best practices and outline both an approach and a series of recommendations for reducing truancy in Pennsylvania.

The Workgroup is co-chaired by the Honorable John Kuhn, President Judge, who presides over juvenile matters for the Fifty First Judicial District of Pennsylvania and Cynthia Stoltz, Esq., Administrator of the Children's Court for the Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania and current chair of the Supreme Court's Juvenile Procedural Rules Committee. Judge Kuhn and Ms. Stoltz are deeply committed to the vision and mission of the Children's Roundtable Initiative. Both have been significant forces in their respective communities and Pennsylvania to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children. The Workgroup includes a variety of respected Pennsylvania experts from the court (judges, hearing officers, magisterial district judges and court administrators), child welfare (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, CYF administrators, managers and social workers), education (Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals and high school principals), juvenile justice (Juvenile Court Judges Commission, Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency) and more recently the Education Law Center.

The Workgroup met regularly over a period of six months with the vast majority of members attending all meetings. Despite the limitations of time and distance, members worked diligently, engaging in robust discussions, exploring a wide range of truancy issues and examining available and somewhat limited education and court truancy data. The workgroup reached consensus on five 'core components' which ultimately formed the cornerstone of their recommendations for change to successfully address the problem of truancy.

The Workgroup identified specific recommendations around the five core components, always mindful of the *Mission and Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania's Child Dependency System*. The importance of ensuring that each Pennsylvania child is afforded the opportunity for a successful educational experience is embedded throughout these guiding principles. Each of the recommendations put forth in this report are supported by guiding principles specifically aimed at schools, agencies, courts, families and communities working together to promote the educational well-being of each child.



## Table of Contents

Introduction and Executive Summary . . . . .	1
Truancy – A National Issue . . . . .	5
Truancy – A Pennsylvania Issue . . . . .	6
Pennsylvania Truancy Laws . . . . .	8
A Profile of Truant Students in Pennsylvania. . . . .	12
Truancy Workgroup Recommendations . . . . .	17
Truancy Programs . . . . .	25
Next Steps for the Truancy Workgroup . . . . .	32
Conclusion . . . . .	32



## Introduction and Executive Summary

Truancy has been referred to as a ‘symptom’ of a larger problem. Often we find, when we dig deeper, that beneath truancy lies a wide variety of issues, ranging from children caring for younger siblings during school hours, performing various duties to provide for families needs, exposure to violence in the home, abuse and neglect (victimization), bullying and/or peer pressure at school, acting out behaviors, incorrigibility and borderline delinquent issues.

Nationally, we know that hundreds of thousands of students are absent without excuse each school day. We also know that although good data is difficult to obtain, truancy is a risk factor for other problems such as academic failure, health issues, and delinquent behavior. Further, we recognize that truant children are less likely to graduate from high school, and that youth without a high school degree are more likely to find themselves in jail or prison later in life.

In Pennsylvania, roughly 8.6% (154,904) of students were “*habitually truant*” (more than six unexcused absences) last year, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education and that number is rising. Although comparative state truancy data is unavailable, it is clear that truancy is a problem throughout the Commonwealth. Data reported from Pennsylvania public schools indicates that truancy has reached crisis proportions in some communities. One county reports truancy rates as high as 37% of compulsory school age children. Pennsylvania closely mirrors the national trend, with boys reported to be slightly more truant than girls. Roughly 25% of truant students are in elementary school, with another 25% in middle school and over 50% of the total habitually truant population in high school. Truancy citations accounted for 13% of overall non-traffic citations filed in magisterial district courts in 2009, with over \$700,000 in truancy related fines collected across the Commonwealth.

The problem of truancy in Pennsylvania is hardly new. Beginning more than a decade ago, interested individuals and organizations convened to address the issue of truancy in Pennsylvania. Those involved in past efforts to reduce truancy include, to name a few, the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Safety Action Plan Truancy Committee (2000), the Statewide Truancy Task Force on School Attendance and Truancy Reduction (2004) with the resulting Basic Education Circular on Compulsory Education and Truancy Elimination Plan issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania Special Court Judges Association Truancy Working Group (2007). The Pennsylvania Truancy Toolkit was also created as a result of the Truancy Task Force recommendations to provide a roadmap for schools and a protocol for quality truancy reduction efforts.

The Workgroup carefully reviewed these initiatives and commends the individuals and organizations involved for their commitment to improving outcomes for children and youth in the child welfare system. They paved the way for additional, coordinated responses. Because the problem of truancy has persisted, more work remains to be done. With sustained, collective attention, we will have success.

The approach of the Workgroup has been to build upon the good work of our predecessors, and to respond to the current needs of Pennsylvania’s communities. The Workgroup surveyed



Pennsylvania Leadership Roundtables to gain a better understanding of counties' truancy issues and practices, and whether there was a 'sense of urgency' about truancy in communities. Survey results (*see Attachment I*) indicated that 90% of responding counties viewed that truancy was an issue of concern in their community.

The above highlights the backdrop against which the Truancy Workgroup commenced its work earlier this year. As the group began discussions, each 'stakeholder' seemed to raise more critical issues than the one before and the group was soon treading in a sea of urgent problems. At first it seemed impossible to envision that the group could do more than scratch the surface to address the complex problem of truancy. The *Mission and Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania's Dependency System* (see box below) provided a context and served as an important touchstone throughout the work and ultimately assisted the workgroup in moving toward a framework for articulating recommendations based on sound policy.

**Applicable Guiding Principles within the document include, but are not limited to:**

Pennsylvania's child dependency system shall:

- *Protect children who are habitually and without justification truant from school.*
- *Support the educational needs of all dependent children.*
- *Support families by stressing the importance of formal education for the child.*
- *Educate families in parenting and life skills.*
- *Identify all possible practices and strategies that address the needs of a child and family and encourage solutions which do not require court intervention.*
- *Utilize the Children's Roundtable Initiative as a mechanism for local and statewide communication, decision making and leadership.*
- *Ensure strong and responsible leadership from all facets of the dependency system, beginning with our courts.*

As discussions continued, common themes emerged and the group ultimately reached consensus on five 'core components'. Simply put, the Workgroup firmly believes that any effective approach to truancy *must*, in order to be successful, address these core components.

The report outlines the five core components; the specific recommendations related to each and highlights best practice approaches/programs for each, as a reference point for communities in developing their own plans. *In recognition of Pennsylvania's diverse and unique communities, the recommendations proposed do not suggest any one 'model' truancy program; rather, they urge communities to adopt a collective strategy to address truancy which may, and likely should, include a group of best practices and programs that incorporate the core components and work together to combat the problem of truancy.* Each community should convene its key stakeholders, collaborate to assess local strengths and needs, consider the core components and explore successful models in developing a community based plan to reduce truancy.



Judicial leadership can play a powerful role in calling stakeholders together. While the court is uniquely situated to convene, the agenda is best determined by community participants who are co-equally invested in system change. This ‘court lead collaboratively driven’ philosophy is inherent in the Children’s Roundtable structure. Currently in Pennsylvania, with active local Children’s Roundtables convened by the Dependency Judge and co-facilitated by the Child Welfare Administrator in most counties, coupled with the adoption of the *Mission and Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania’s Child Dependency System* and a better understanding of family engagement strategies, county stakeholders are poised to utilize the local Children’s Roundtable as the vehicle to implement system change to reduce truancy in the community.

National leaders must consider the impact of truancy on our nation’s children. So too, Pennsylvania and its local leaders must act to reduce truancy and ensure that children’s basic needs are met.

The task of the Truancy Workgroup was to gather information and identify a set of recommendations and best practices that would work. We believe they *can* work. The test, however, ultimately lies in the commitment of community leaders to share responsibility to address the problems of truancy head-on, change the culture around education and ensure regular school attendance for every child in their community. We hope that community stakeholders will recognize the urgency to address truancy *now*, and be inspired by this report and the commitment of the Workgroup members to act decisively and implement these recommendations.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1** • Demonstrate Effective Collaboration Efforts Including Sharing the Accountability and Responsibility for Truancy

- 1.1 Utilize the local children's roundtable as the vehicle to form a community truancy coalition.
- 1.2 Identify multi-system stakeholders in an effort to reduce truancy.
- 1.3 Cultivate positive working relationships among stakeholders so they can effectively communicate across systems.
- 1.4 Adopt a collective strategy to address truancy which includes a combination of best practices working together to combat truancy.
- 1.5 Develop ongoing opportunities for cross-training of stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 2** • Create an Educational Culture/Climate that Prioritizes Students' Connection to their School and Engages Families

- 2.1 Create an environment where students and their families feel safe, welcome, wanted and connected to their educational environment.
- 2.2 Prioritize the issue of truancy in schools.
- 2.3 Engage Parents as a necessary and valued partner.
- 2.4 Develop appropriate reentry and reintegration strategies for truant and other absent youth.
- 2.5 Develop incentives and sanctions along a continuum when addressing truancy with an emphasis on encouraging a student to continue their education.
- 2.6 Meaningfully and proactively engage the larger community to create and sustain a positive school climate.

### **Recommendation 3** • Implement Specific Strategies with Measurable Outcomes Targeting Prevention, Early Identification and Intervention

- 3.1 Identify truant children and engage families as early as possible.
- 3.2 Develop a Truancy Elimination Plan immediately following the 3<sup>rd</sup> unlawful absence.
- 3.3 Develop a continuum of timely responses.
- 3.4 Examine truancy within the context of the "whole child".

### **Recommendation 4** • Track Truancy Data and Program Outcomes and Share Information with Stakeholders

- 4.1 Identify critical data to be collected.
- 4.2 Determine how attendance and truancy data will be collected, maintained, shared and disseminated.
- 4.3 Employ creative strategies to share data.
- 4.4 Use data to educate, inform and influence the community.

### **Recommendation 5** • Build Sustainable Funding Bases and Allocate Resources Based on Data Informed Decisions and Partnerships that Maximize Efficiencies

- 5.1 Promote a true collaborative effort by deciding what resources are available and combining those resources to maximize the impact of federal, state and local dollars.
- 5.2 Engage local businesses, community, civic organizations, non-profit organizations, universities and the faith based community to identify both fiscal and in-kind resources.
- 5.3 Research potential grant funding opportunities with local and national foundations.
- 5.4 Integrate truancy prevention into existing funding streams to include the needs based plan and budgeting process, integrated children's services planning, Communities That Care and other initiatives.
- 5.5 Evaluate local truancy programs to determine effectiveness.



## Truancy - A National Issue

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin on Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School (2001)*, nationally each school day, hundreds of thousands of students are missing from their classrooms — many without a bona fide excuse. Although it is apparent that truancy exists in most American communities and can be considered a crisis in some, an exact and current number of truants eludes us. National truancy data is difficult to gather since there is no uniform definition used to calculate the truancy rate because each state's compulsory education laws differ. What we do know is that truancy is a risk factor for a myriad of problems that can affect young children through adolescence, the teenage years and into adulthood. Truancy can also be a “gateway” to serious criminal offenses and is often a key indicator that a child may be severely neglected.<sup>1</sup>

Studies reviewing truant students' personal characteristics, have found that truant students are more likely to have one or more of the following issues: academic failure, poor social and emotional functioning, ethnic or race dissonance, health problems, and an inability to feel a part of their school culture.<sup>2</sup> In addition, truant students are at a higher rate for becoming delinquent. However, the root causes for truancy vary by individual and that in addition to the personal characteristics noted above, family factors, school factors, economic influences and community factors can all attribute to truancy.<sup>3</sup>

Fragmented truancy data collection aside, one thing we do know is that truant children are less likely to graduate from high school. The Annie E. Casey Foundation reported (*2009 Kids Count Data Book on State Profiles of Child Well-Being*) there were approximately 1.2 million teens nationwide between the ages of 16 and 19 who were not in school and had not graduated from high school in 2007. Dropout rates ranged from 2% in North Dakota to 11% in Nevada. Pennsylvania ranked 19<sup>th</sup> nationwide, where 6% (41,000) of teens were high school dropouts.

According to a report by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Alternative Schools Network in Chicago, Illinois in 2007, 16 percent (nearly 6.2 million or one out of six) of people between the ages of 16 and 24 were dropouts. The largest populations affected by the dropout crisis include men, Blacks and Hispanics. With the national graduation rate at approximately 70 percent, the financial ramifications associated with truancy and consequentially dropping out of school affect not only the individual but society as a whole. According to data from the 2000 census, high school dropouts had only a 52% employment rate in 1999 compared to 71% for high school graduates and 83% for college graduates. Of those who worked full time year round in 1999, high school dropouts earned only 65% of the median earnings.

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<sup>1</sup> Byer, Joan and Kuhn, Jeffrey (2003). A Model Response to Truancy Prevention: The Louisville Truancy Court Diversion Project. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* Winter 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Burley, Mason and Harding, Edie (1998). Truant Students Evaluating the Impact of the “Becca Bill” Truancy Petition Requirements. *Washington State Institute for Public Policy*.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Myriam L., Sigmon, Jane Nady and Nugent, Elaine M. (September 2001). Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School. *OJJDP Bulletin*.

The Center for Labor Market Studies also estimates that adults with high school diplomas make more than \$400,000 and contribute major fiscal benefits to the country over their working lifetime. The Center estimates that “the combined net fiscal” benefits – including the payment of payroll, federal and state income taxes, and local property taxes versus the receipt of cash and in-kind transfers and the considerable costs of incarceration and parole/probation – adds up to more than \$250,000 per youth who finishes high school over their lifetime relative to the average high school dropout.<sup>4</sup> In addition, those who have not obtained a high school degree are far more likely to be unemployed and students who drop out of school are more than eight times more likely to be in jail or prison. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 50% of inmates enter prison without a GED or a high school diploma and the median reading level for those incarcerated in Pennsylvania State Correctional Institutions is sixth grade.

## **Truancy - A Pennsylvania Issue**

Although comparative state truancy data is unavailable, Pennsylvania stakeholders are certainly aware that truancy is a problem throughout the Commonwealth. In 2009, Pennsylvania public elementary and secondary schools reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education more than 150,000 or 8.6% of students habitually truant (six or more unexcused absences) from school. Inside that statistic lie individual county percentages which indicate that truancy has reached crisis proportions in some communities. In Philadelphia County, for instance, more than 12,000 children are truant on a given day, a figure that represents 37% of Philadelphia County’s compulsory school age children.

Pennsylvania stakeholders also recognize that there are numerous family issues that may lead to truancy and that in order to combat truancy; a multifaceted approach is needed to address the underlying causes. Whether a county houses a major, mid size or small metropolitan area or is largely agrarian, whether a county is thriving economically, holding it’s own or working to re-energize exhausted or outdated economic resources - the Commonwealth realizes that potential remedies have to target the numerous and complex causes of truancy. Identifying truancy issues that many counties seem to share as well as tailoring remedies to issues germane to individual communities must involve a commitment and collaboration from local community stakeholders. Effective truancy reduction efforts require policies, protocols and programs to be developed and adopted at the local level as communities know what is best for their children and have a vested interest in their success.

Starting more than a decade ago, state agencies and organizations convened committee groups comprised of cross-systems representatives to address Pennsylvania’s truancy problems, laws and practices and to offer recommendations and resources on how to best deal with truancy on the local level. Listed below is information regarding those committees and their work.

The Statewide Truancy Task Force on School Attendance & Truancy Reduction “No Child Left Behind” (P.L. 107 – No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) placed increased emphasis on student

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<sup>4</sup> Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University and the Chicago Alternative Schools Network. (May 2009). *Left Behind in America: The Nation’s Dropout Crisis*, Boston, Massachusetts and Chicago, Illinois.



achievement and attendance, elevating the importance of studying Pennsylvania's efforts to reduce truancy. The Statewide Truancy Task Force on School Attendance & Truancy Reduction was created in 2004 to find effective practices to promote increased achievement in Pennsylvania's schools.

The charge of the Task Force was to identify attributes of quality attendance programs and promising practices; cite problems and barriers; and provide resources and recommend solutions for combating truancy; with the ultimate goal of helping to support academic achievement. Members of the Task Force included representatives from key stakeholders such as: educators, Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, probation officers, legislators, professional colleagues, county stakeholders and cross-agency staff.

The Task Force was provided a broad base of resources to assist them in accomplishing the charge, including research from leading education organizations, such as the Education Trust, Education Commission of the States and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The group was also directed to Pennsylvania laws and regulations on truancy, Pennsylvania truancy reduction programs and several promising practices that were already accomplishing great things in the state. Recommendations from previous Pennsylvania work groups were shared with the group, including the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee's Dropout and Truancy Prevention Programs and Efforts and Attorney General Fisher's School Safety Action Plan.

Among other recommendations, the Task Force identified the need to create a roadmap for schools that clearly and consistently identified the protocol in implementing quality truancy reduction efforts. The Task Force's recommendations proposed the development of a Toolkit for School Attendance & Truancy Reduction. It was through this recommendation and the hard work of the Task Force that the toolkit was developed. The Pennsylvania Truancy Tool Kit, available at the following website <http://www.patruancytoolkit.info/> contains:

- A new Basic Education Circular (BEC) Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan
- Best practices in truancy reduction
- Sample letters and brochures
- Job descriptions for truancy officers in school systems
- Examples of truancy reduction technology and student attendance systems and
- Quick reference materials that can be used by magisterial district judges, schools and parents

#### Basic Education Circular – Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan

In August 2006, the Pennsylvania Department of Education issued a Basic Education Circular (BEC) on Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan (**see Attachment 2**) as a result of the Statewide Task Force on School Attendance and Truancy Reduction, so that magisterial district judges, parents and schools would receive guidance on what could be done to help Pennsylvania's truant children achieve academic success. The BEC was driven by the

recommendations of the Task Force to facilitate a statewide response to truancy and absenteeism as well as the development of a prevention and intervention strategy continuum that involved collaboration among schools, law enforcement agencies, social service providers, faith-based and youth serving agencies. The BEC, which remains the current educational standard for handling instances of truancy, describes Pennsylvania pupil attendance and truancy law and offers recommendations made by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to encourage the adoption of proven truancy reduction strategies. Recommendations include creating a community plan to keep children in school by informing stakeholders, family involvement, the school district as the first line of defense against habitual absenteeism and the role of the Attendance Officer or Home and School Visitor. The BEC also provides recommended school responses to unlawful absenteeism. It advises that after the third unlawful absence the school district shall coordinate a school/family conference to discuss the cause of the child's truancy and develop a mutually agreed upon Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) to resolve the truant behavior. The conference should address the child's educational environment, current academic difficulties, physical or behavioral health issues and family/environment concerns. At the conclusion of the conference and consensus of all parties, a written TEP should be prepared and signed by the school representative, the child and parents/family. Example plan elements could include accessing academic and social/health supports from the school and community organizations, an outline of family/parent and student responsibilities, and a description of performance levels to be monitored including rewards and consequences.

#### Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania Truancy Working Group

In 2007, The Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania formed a group to examine truancy as a result of frustrations expressed by magisterial district judges surrounding the topic. The work group is comprised of magisterial district judges, representatives from the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare, the Juvenile Court Judges Commission, the Juvenile Probation Officers Association, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and most recently the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts.

The primary focus of the group was to review truancy issues from the magisterial district judge perspective and develop a strategy to improve how magisterial district courts approach truancy. The Group also aimed to develop improved communication and collaboration of all agencies concerned with the issue of truancy. This included reviewing the relationship between the school districts and the magisterial district courts, the involvement of dependency trial courts and children and youth agencies and the participation of other social service agencies. The group is currently developing legislative proposals and a sample of best practices and policies to share with the Special Court Judges Association members.

## **Pennsylvania Truancy Laws**

What is the definition of truancy in Pennsylvania? The simple answer is that truancy is the failure to attend school. However, from a statutory point of view, the answer is more complex. Pennsylvania's Public School Code does not have a specific definition for the word "truancy".



As will be seen, a child becomes “truant” upon attaining a specific number of unexcused absences. Under provisions of the Code, specifically 24 P.S. §13-1327, every child of compulsory school age (from when a child’s parents elect to enroll the child in school, which shall be no later than age 8, until age 17) is required to attend a day school unless the child satisfies one of the exceptions set forth in §13-1330. §13-1329 charges each school board with setting policies governing pupil absences and excuses which shall be considered lawful.

The school principal is required to report to the superintendent any child who has been absent three (3) days “during the term of compulsory attendance, without lawful excuse.” 24 P.S. §13-1332 (emphasis added). A strict reading of the Code would suggest that a child is “truant” if he or she has three (3) unexcused absences during the entire time the child is subject to compulsory attendance.

In Pennsylvania, the legal actions that are permitted or which are required for violation of the provisions regarding compulsory school attendance vary according to the circumstances. The school district may file a summary citation with the local district court against the parent/guardian or child or, in the alternative, refer the matter to the local children & youth services agency for services or the filing of a dependency proceeding.

Before the school district may file a summary citation with the local district court, the school must give the offending person three (3) days written notice that the provision regarding compulsory school attendance has been violated. Thereafter, during the child’s term of compulsory attendance, if there is another unexcused absence, the school may proceed without further notice.<sup>5</sup> 24 P.S. §13-1333(a)(1). After the filing of the complaint a **hearing** is scheduled at which **both the parent/guardian and child** are required to **attend**. §13-1333(a)(2).

If the parent/guardian is found guilty the magisterial district judge has a variety of options to consider including:

- a. Imposing a fine not to exceed \$300.00 payable to the benefit of the school district together with court costs (§13-1333(a)(1));
- b. Attending a parenting program (§13-1333(a)(1));<sup>6</sup>
- c. Ordering the parent/guardian to perform community service in the school district for a period not to exceed six(6) months (§13-1333(a)(4));

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<sup>5</sup> Some confusion potentially exists between this section and §13-1354. The latter section provides that the appropriate school personnel shall be notified of every child who has been absent three (3) days, or the equivalent, without lawful excuse. The school shall then provide the parent/guardian with written notice of the absences and “and if it shall appear that, within three (3) days thereafter, any child, parent, guardian ... shall have failed to comply with the provisions of this act, the [school] ... shall proceed against the person so offending in accordance with the provisions of this act.” After written notice is given §13-1333 suggests that the next unlawful absence can precipitate the filing of a citation before the Magisterial District Judge whereas §13-1354 indicates that “within three (3) days thereafter” the school can proceed. Does this mean the school can proceed anytime after the 4<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence, only if the 4<sup>th</sup> absence occurs within the three day period after the notice is given, or upon the 6<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence? See footnote No. 7, below.

<sup>6</sup> If the parent defaults in paying the fine or in completing the parenting program he/she **shall** be sentenced to the county jail for a period not exceeding five (5) days. §13-1333(a)(1).

- d. Suspending the sentence in whole or in part provided that the child is no longer **habitually truant**<sup>7</sup> from school without justification (§13-1333(a)(3)).

If the parent/guardian satisfies the magisterial district judge that he/she took every reasonable steps to insure attendance of the child at school a not guilty verdict shall be entered. §13-1333(a)(2). If a not guilty verdict is entered for this reason and the **child is 13 years old or older and** has failed to comply with compulsory attendance **or** has been habitually truant without justification a summary citation may be filed against that child. §13-1333(b)(1). Upon conviction of that child the magisterial district judge again has a variety of options to consider including:

- a. Imposing a fine not to exceed \$300.00 payable to the benefit of the school district (§13-1333(b)(1));
- b. Assigning the child to an adjudication alternative program pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S.A. s1520<sup>8</sup> (§13-1333(b)(1));
- c. Suspending the sentence in whole or in part provided the child is no longer habitually truant from school without justification (§13-1333(b)(3)).
- d. Notifying the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation of the conviction (§13-1333(c)).<sup>9</sup>

Should a **child age 13 years or older** fail to comply with option (a) or (b), above, the magisterial district judge **may allege** the child to be a dependent child under provisions of the Juvenile Act. §13-1333(b)(2). However, failure of the child to pay the fine shall not be considered a delinquent act under the Juvenile Act. §13-1333(b)(2).<sup>10</sup>

If the parent/guardian satisfies the magisterial district judge that he/she took every reasonable step to insure attendance of the child at school, a not guilty verdict is entered, the **child is under the age of 13 years**, and the child has failed to comply with compulsory attendance **and** is

<sup>7</sup> The term “habitually truant” under §13-1333 means absence for more than three (3) school days or their equivalent following the first notice of truancy given under §13-1354. A person may be habitually truant after such notice. §13-1333(b)(5).

<sup>8</sup> 42 Pa.C.S.A. 1520 allows a Magisterial District Judge to place a person charged with certain summary offenses in an appropriate program approved by the Court of Common Pleas which may include work, counseling, public service, job training, education, appropriate community service, self-improvement, costs, restitution, and a reasonable administrative fee.

<sup>9</sup> The Department of Transportation shall suspend the driving privileges of the child for a period of 90 days for the first offense and for a period of 6 months for each subsequent offense. If the child has not obtained his/her driving privileges the right to do so shall be delayed for the aforementioned periods. § 13-1338.1.

<sup>10</sup> The Juvenile Act provides that a child can be considered delinquent if he/she after a summary conviction fails to pay the financial obligations imposed. 42 Pa.C.S.A. 6302. The School Code would be an exception. Essentially, such fines are uncollectible. The Magisterial District Judge cannot impose any sanction upon the child for failure to pay. Juvenile Probation cannot collect the fine or provide services because the failure to pay does not constitute a delinquent act. Truancy can be referred to Children & Youth Services agencies for services or disposition as a dependent child but there is no mechanism in place for the collection of the delinquent fine. This raises a question as to the appropriateness of even imposing fines against truant children if there is no realistic way to collect those fines.



habitually truant the school **shall refer** the child for services or possible disposition as a dependent child under provisions of the Juvenile Act. §13-1333(b)(4).

The Code also identifies consequences and penalties for non-enforcement. School officials who willfully refuse or neglect to comply with provisions of the School Code relating to compulsory school attendance shall be liable for a fine of up to \$25.00 and, in default thereof, be incarcerated in the county jail for a period not to exceed thirty (30) days. §13-1355.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the Juvenile Act defines a dependent child as including a child who ‘while subject to compulsory school attendance is habitually and without justification truant from school.’ 42 Pa.C.S.A. 6302. There is an assumption that the term “habitually and without justification truant” under the Juvenile Act is equivalent to “habitually truant” under the School Code but the Legislature has not clarified that assumption. The burden of proof needed to find a child dependent is “clear and convincing evidence.” 42 Pa.C.S.A. 6341 (C). A child adjudicated dependent may be permitted to remain with his/her parents or removed and placed outside the home. However, before removing a child from the home there must have been reasonable efforts made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal or that the lack of efforts was reasonable due to the emergency nature of the situation. 42 Pa.C.S.A. 6351.

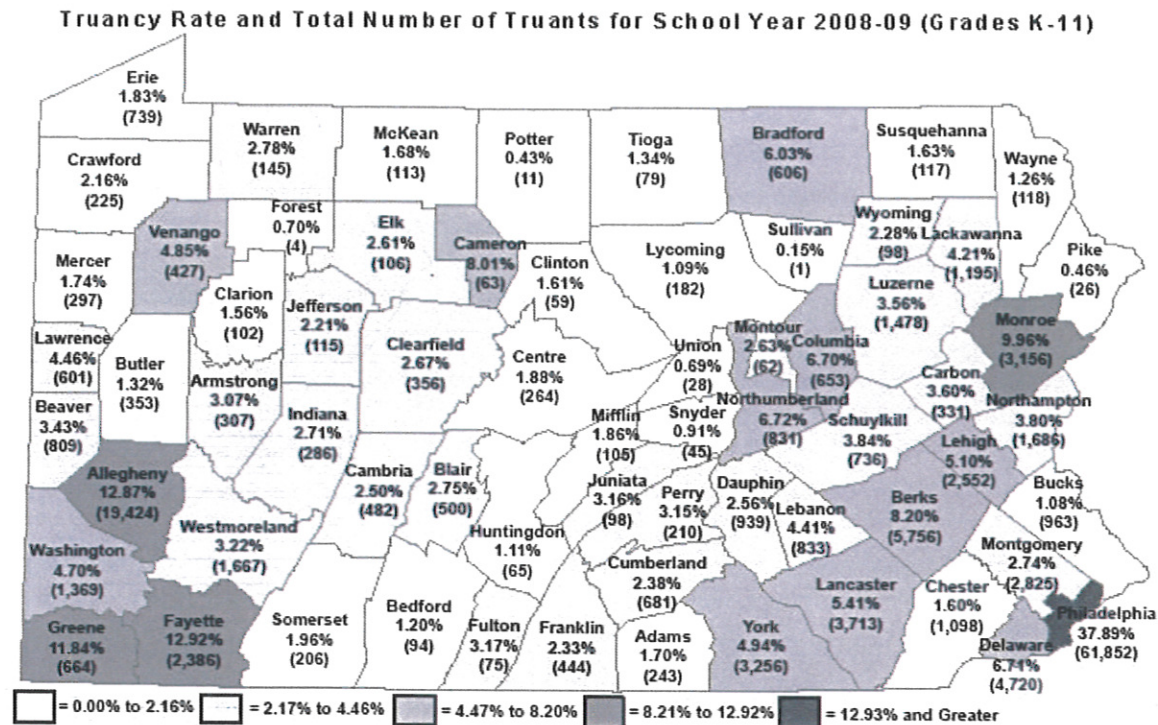
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<sup>11</sup> It is unclear who would be responsible for filing these charges.

## A Profile of Truant Students in Pennsylvania

### Demographics

The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires public schools (pre-K-12 including cyber schools) to report the number of habitually truant students (6 or more unexcused absences). Based on data self-reported by Pennsylvania public schools, the percentage of habitually truant students in the 2008-2009 school year varies from 0% in rural counties, like Potter and Forest, to more than 37% in Philadelphia.



\*source PA Department of Education

The above map, provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, shows information on the percentage of habitually truant students compared to the overall number of compulsory school age children in the county. In order to gain a more accurate picture, it is important for stakeholders to review truancy numbers for individual school districts within the county to determine if a truancy problem exists, what specific school and/or sub-set of students most affected may assist local communities plan for and target resources.

What can be derived after analyzing state truancy data is that 8.6% or 154,904 of Pennsylvania students were habitually truant during the 2008-2009 school year. This number does not include those students who have been unlawfully absent for five or fewer days in the school year. When comparing data from 2007 through 2009, the state's total school population has decreased, but the percentage of habitually truant students has increased. Additionally, Pennsylvania closely mirrors the national trend with boys being slightly more truant than girls. Approximately 25% of

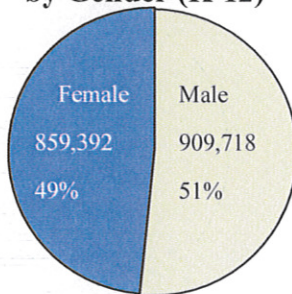


truant students are in elementary school, 25% in middle school and 50% in high school. Yet another disturbing statistic is seen in examining truancy and disproportionality rates. African American students represent the largest population of truant students at 47% but account for only 17% of the total compulsory school age children in the state. As with African American students, disproportionality also exists with Hispanic students. Hispanic students have a truancy rate of 17% but account for only 7% of the total compulsory school age children in the state.

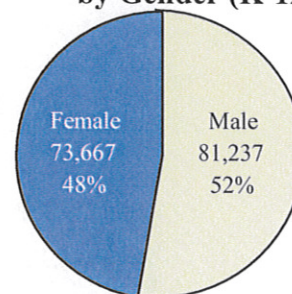
**PA State Total Habitually Truant 2007-2009**

Year	Total PA School Population	Total PA Habitually Truant K-12	Percent Habitually Truant
2007	1,821,383	147,188	8.08%
2008	1,843,194	148,939	8.08%
2009	1,787,351	154,904	8.67%

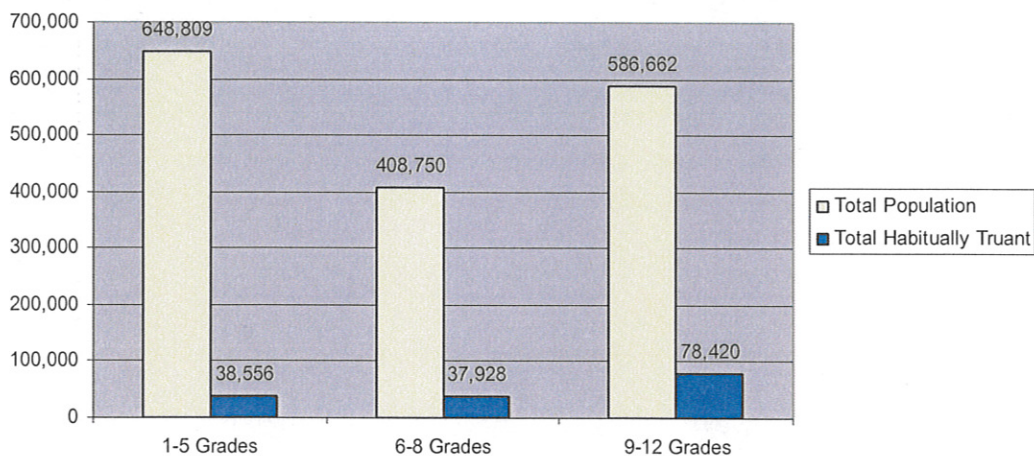
**SY 08-09 School Population by Gender (K-12)**



**SY 08-09 Habitually Truant by Gender (K-12)**

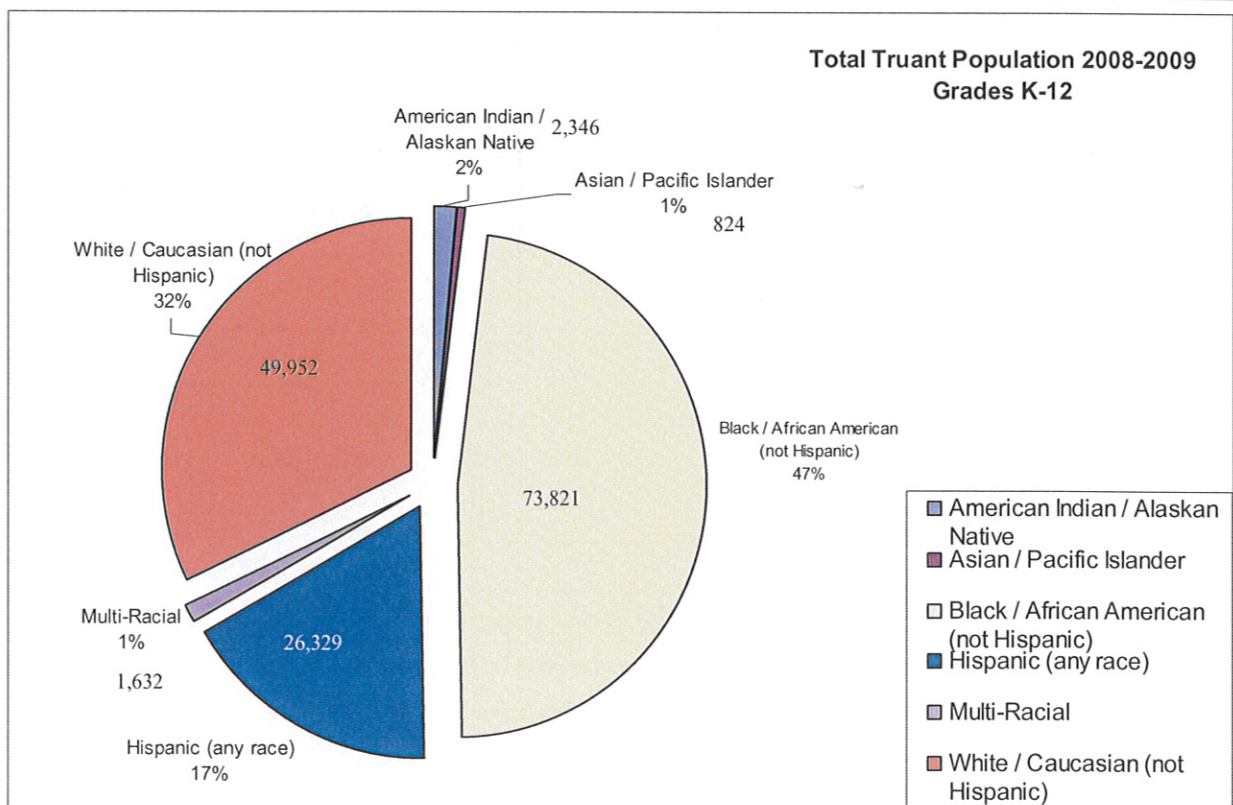
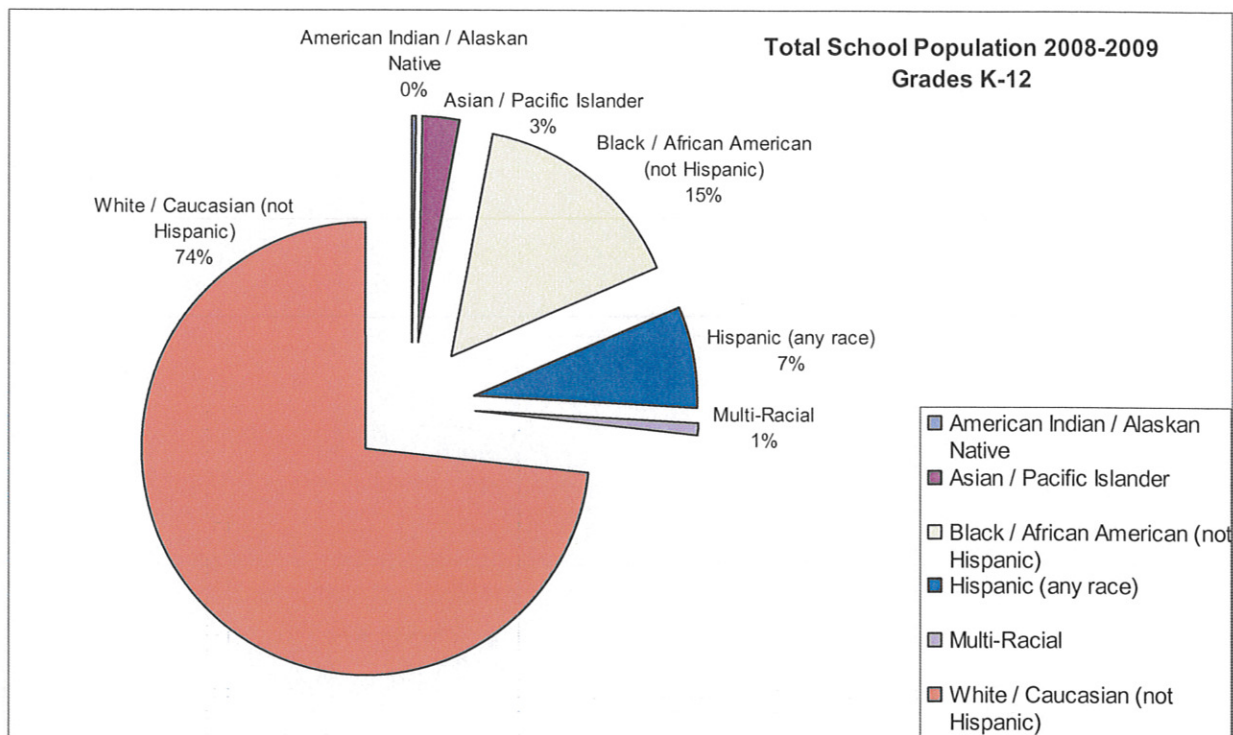


**SY 08-09 Total School Population vs. Total Habitually Truant Population**



**PA State Total Habitually Truant by Grade Level 2009**

Grade Level (K-12)	Habitually Truant	Percent Habitually Truant by Grade Level
Grades 1-5	38,556	24.89%
Grades 6-8	37,928	24.48%
Grades 9-12	78,420	50.62%





### Court Data

In 2009, truancy citations accounted for 13% of overall non-traffic citations filed in magisterial district courts. When considering 13%, caseload is easily measured where as workload is not. Magisterial district judges likely spend more time with truancy cases than other non-traffic citations brought before the court because of the sometimes complex issues that have led to truant behavior. Although the number of habitually truant students is rising, the number of truancy citations filed against those students and/or their parents/guardians has declined. The total number of truancy citations filed against both parents/guardians and juveniles in magisterial district courts between 2007 and 2008 increased from 66,307 to 68,046. In 2009, the total number of truancy citations (57,555) decreased 15.4% from 2008. There is no clear reason why this number declined between 2008 and 2009, as data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicates that the percentage of habitually truant students increased during this time period. Some possible reasons may include overall citation numbers decreased from 2008 to 2009 and/or schools and children and youth agencies may be addressing the issue prior to court involvement. Based on the data shown in the table below, truancy citations are more often (71%-73%) filed against the parent or guardian as opposed to the student.

A school district files citations directly with the magisterial district court. Any fine monies collected by the magisterial district courts are returned to the schools. In 2009, roughly \$700,000 in fines were collected by the magisterial district courts across the Commonwealth and sent to schools. There are no guidelines outlining how schools can or should use the collected fine money. Many school districts deposit these dollars into their general fund account.

The data below does not include citations filed by the Philadelphia school system because the data was gathered from the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Magisterial District Justice System. Philadelphia County handles truancy cases directly through its Court of Common Pleas, Family Court Juvenile Branch as there are no magisterial district courts in this county. Philadelphia hears approximately 11,000 new truancy cases per year for those students who have more than ten illegal absences; and collected approximately \$12,000 in truancy related fines in 2009.

**Magisterial District Court Truancy Data\***

Year	Total Citations	Citations against Juvenile	% of Total Citations against Juveniles	Citations against Parent or Guardian	% of Total Citations against Parent or Guardian	Juveniles Certified to Court of Common Pleas for failure to pay fines	Total fines collected and paid to School Districts
2007	66,307	17,852	26.9%	48,455	73%	4,542	\$1,589,199
2008	68,046	18,159	26.7%	49,887	73%	4,705	\$1,454,887
2009	57,555	16,517	28.7%	41,038	71%	2,707	\$709,153

**\*See Attachment 3 which shows the above information for individual counties.**

### Leadership Roundtable Truancy Survey Results

The Truancy Exploration Workgroup surveyed Pennsylvania Leadership Roundtable members (lead Dependency Judge and Children and Youth Administrator) to gain a better understanding of whether or not counties viewed truancy as an issue, how truancy is handled locally and whether or not there was a “sense of urgency” about truancy in communities. Fifty two counties responded to the survey and provided comments on what was working well, where improvement was needed and offered some suggestions on how to create a local “sense of urgency” surrounding the issue. Survey results (*see Attachment 1*) indicated that 90% of those counties who responded believed truancy was in fact an issue of concern in their county. Twenty-two (22) counties reported that truancy was being effectively handled citing stakeholder collaboration, standardized protocols, effective programming, magisterial district judge uniformity and timely responses as being key to handling the issue. Counties that reported truancy was not being handled effectively (16) identified the following barriers: no collaboration, inconsistency in handling referrals, not addressing the problem in elementary school, filing citations too late in the school year and not utilizing the Truancy Elimination Plan. There were 13 counties who answered both “yes and no” to whether or not truancy was being handled effectively reporting that there were both positive responses and barriers to addressing truancy. Thirty-four (34) counties reported that they did not have a cross systems truancy reduction program. Slightly more than half of those who responded indicated that they utilized a truancy protocol. The majority of counties (34) indicated that there was no liaison between the school districts and the courts. Nineteen (19) counties reported having an educational system representative on their local children’s roundtable and only five (5) counties reported having a magisterial district judge who actively participates on the group. Finally, more than 65% of those who responded indicated that there was no “sense of urgency” about truancy in their community.



## Truancy Workgroup Recommendations

The collective wisdom of the workgroup, a review of truancy literature, analysis of education and court truancy data and an evaluation of work that came before led the group to identify five core themes to any successful truancy reduction strategy. We urge the recommendations be adopted as a comprehensive approach to support local community truancy reduction efforts.

- 1. Demonstrate Effective Collaboration Efforts Including Sharing the Accountability and Responsibility for Truancy**
- 2. Create an Educational Culture/Climate that Prioritizes Students' Connection to their School and Engages Families**
- 3. Implement Specific Strategies with Measurable Outcomes Targeting Prevention, Early Identification and Intervention**
- 4. Track Truancy Data and Program Outcomes and Share Information with Stakeholders**
- 5. Build Sustainable Funding Bases and Allocate Resources Based on Data Informed Decisions and Partnerships that Maximize Efficiencies**

These themes are further articulated in the following pages.

### **1. Demonstrate Effective Collaboration Efforts Including Sharing the Accountability and Responsibility for Truancy**

#### **Identified Concern:**

Truancy is a multifaceted issue where schools, courts, child welfare agencies, juvenile probation departments and other organizations frequently become frustrated because while each separate system may have ways to address truancy, there is no common goal developed, endorsed and supported by all stakeholders. System players may not know who other stakeholders are, what their role is, or how they can combine efforts to effectively reduce truancy.

#### **Description of the Concern:**

Often times, truancy is not handled as effectively and timely as it could because collaboration does not exist between key stakeholders and multiple system players are utilizing multiple approaches to address the issue. Each stakeholder may be doing their part, but without a concerted effort, where each stakeholder accepts accountability and responsibility for truancy it



may be frustrating and difficult to impact the problem and address the issues of the “whole child”.

## Recommendations:

**1-1. *Utilize the local children’s roundtable as the vehicle to form a community truancy coalition.*** The local children’s roundtable model best reflects the level of collaboration necessary to ensure optimal truancy reduction through system wide improvement. The court is uniquely situated to convene stakeholders, articulate the “sense of urgency” as it relates to truancy, and encourage the development of local common goals and protocols. While the court is uniquely situated to convene, the agenda should be collaboratively driven by all stakeholders equally interested in system change.

**1-2. *Identify multi-system stakeholders in an effort to reduce truancy.*** At a minimum, this group should include school superintendents, principals, local children and youth agency staff, juvenile probation staff, magisterial district judges, mental health/mental retardation (MH/MR) professionals, drug and alcohol professionals, and the court. Other suggested stakeholders include: medical professionals, student assistance programs, parents & children, advocates, community members, churches and community/university mentors.

**1-3. *Cultivate positive working relationships among stakeholders so they can effectively communicate across systems.*** Stakeholders

should understand and appreciate the terminology, motivation and goals of other stakeholders. Each stakeholder must identify an individual(s) responsible for addressing truancy issues and work with others toward timely and effective resolution. It may be necessary to obtain a written agreement or a memorandum of understanding among stakeholders to clearly identify roles, responsibilities and commitment.

**1-4. *Adopt a collective strategy to address truancy which includes a combination of best practices working together to combat truancy.*** The community must assess and evaluate

### Team Approach to Combat Truancy in York County

More than a decade ago, the Honorable John Uhler, York County Pennsylvania, made the troubling observations that as many as 90%-95% of youth appearing before him in juvenile delinquency court proceedings were habitually truant. In response to the alarming statistics Judge Uhler convened the **Truancy Response Initiative (TRI)** and sought partnerships with the schools, county children and youth agency, district attorney’s office, juvenile probation and community partners to address truancy issues related to data collection, public relations, medical/health, business and community. Through the strategies of goal setting and keeping each stakeholder accountable for their part in truancy efforts, the TRI created a York County-wide truancy protocol that each school district has endorsed and follows. This approach, convened by the court, is a true collaboration and is committed to working openly with each partner, provider and agency to educate York County residents on the importance of consistent attendance and to expand truancy prevention evidence based best practices. Judge Uhler attributes the success of the TRI to working diligently at cultivating relationships with stakeholders, defining a common understanding of truancy related efforts that cross systems and holding all stakeholders accountable.

*“Our alarming nationwide statistics mandate both state and local preventative responses. The stakeholders are many and extend far beyond the students, the family and the educational system. Juvenile Judges are uniquely positioned to raise community awareness, energize, mobilize and engage these diverse community stakeholders in order to effectively collaborate and address these critical concerns.”* – Honorable John C. Uhler, York County

its own strength and weaknesses, determine the need, who to serve, how to achieve the goal and identify specific measurable outcomes. It is the community as a whole which is impacted on many levels by truancy therefore; it is the community as a whole that needs to be invested in practices aimed at truancy reduction.

- 1-5 *Develop ongoing opportunities for cross-training of stakeholders.*** It is important for stakeholders to understand the role of partnering agencies/courts/organizations and how various systems can work together when addressing and impacting truancy.

## **2. Create an Educational Culture/Climate that Prioritizes Students' Connection to their School and Engages Families**

**Identified Concern:** Lack of a healthy, productive and safe educational culture/climate at school often contributes to truancy and high dropout rates.

**Description of the Concern:** With so many requirements, expectations and demands competing for attention and limited resources, truancy is not always identified as a priority for schools. When students fail to regularly attend school opportunities to establish a sense of “connectedness” or “belonging” at school is significantly jeopardized. In these instances, students and their families can lose or never establish a “connection” with their educational community. Absence of this connection may lead to further truancy, bullying, poor performance, high dropout rates and other behavioral problems that impact a student’s educational well-being.

### **Recommendations:**

- 2-1 *Create an environment where students and their families feel safe, welcome, wanted and connected to their educational environment.*** Local school entities are encouraged to develop strategies to include students, parents and other community members in improving academic achievement through their active and valued participation in the development of the local education agency’s positive school climate goals and plan. This should include positive and behavioral supports that promote student achievement and success as well as school programming and policies that are designed to address the needs of today’s student population.
- 2-2 *Prioritize the issue of truancy in schools.*** School officials are encouraged to follow guidelines outlined in the Pennsylvania Truancy Tool Kit including the utilization of the Truancy Elimination Plan for any student who has more than three unlawful absences. The plan should be written in collaboration with parents, guardians, teachers, school administrators, the student, and others with an interest in the student’s success.
- 2-3 *Engage parents as a necessary and valued partner.*** The responsibility of parenting a child doesn’t stop at the school door. Parents must be considered a necessary and valued



partner with shared responsibility for their child's educational well-being including the development of a strategy to eliminate their child's truant behaviors.

- 2-4 *Develop appropriate reentry and reintegration strategies for truant and other absent youth.*** School entities are encouraged to identify appropriate options and resources for students to make-up missed coursework in a timely manner to support student academic success.
- 2-5. *Develop incentives and sanctions along a continuum when addressing truancy with an emphasis on encouraging a student to continue their education.*** The school community is encouraged to develop strategies that model and promote academic success for all students. Creating a continuum of incentives and sanctions that ensure accountability of the student while emphasizing school official's belief in the student's capacity to achieve are critical in combating truancy. Out of school suspension should not be utilized as a punishment for truant youth.
- 2-6 *Meaningfully and proactively engage the larger community to create and sustain a positive school climate.*** Schools are encouraged to engage all educational stakeholders (e.g. school administrators, parents, students, faculty, staff, first responders, faith-based groups, social and health services, courts, and municipal administrators) in identifying barriers to learning and developing strategies to address those barriers.

**Importance of a Positive School Climate  
Quotes from Pennsylvania Stakeholders**

*"The Department of Education strongly promotes and supports the principle that each local education agency through building a strong school-community must provide a positive school climate environment. This positive climate must support and encourage the connectiveness of its students and local community to it's schools, promote students to remain in school and succeed, and develop healthy and socially competent lifestyles which in the end will result in them becoming productive members of the workforce and positive contributing members of their family and community." - Thomas Gluck, Acting Secretary of Education*

*In Philadelphia, more than 12,000 children are truant on any given day. Truancy, a precursor to dropping out, is a major indicator of academic failure, and truant students are at a high risk for delinquency, early pregnancy and substance abuse. The correlation between truancy and these risks means that getting our children to school is a critical factor in improving public safety and assuring positive outcomes for all our children." Honorable Judge Butchart, Philadelphia County*

*"Education is the key to success. Children need to be in school in order to provide them with the tools they will need for a successful future. It is the responsibility of educational leaders, community agencies and families to make truancy a priority. We are all accountable." – Colleen Newell, Assistant Principal, Scranton High School*



## Implement Specific Strategies with Measurable Outcomes Targeting Prevention, Early Identification and Intervention

### Identified Concern:

Although uniquely positioned to identify student concerns early in the educational process, many school districts do not make timely referrals to children and youth agencies delaying the implementation of supportive services which have the potential to help the truant child and their family when such services are initially needed. Once a referral is made, the assessment focuses on allegations; rather than the underlying issues that likely caused truancy. Often truancy is symptomatic of other underlying family issues.

### Description of the Concern:

Referrals to County Children and Youth Agencies and citations filed with magisterial district judges often occur after a substantial truancy problem exists for a child. Once a pattern of chronic truancy is established it can be difficult to get students back on the right path to regular school attendance and educational success.

### Recommendations:

#### 3-1. *Identify truant children and engage families as early as possible.*

Determining and addressing the underlying causes of truancy may prevent chronic truant behavior patterns. Parents/guardians and other family members or people

important to the child should be considered a valued partner in identifying potential reasons for truancy, addressing those reasons, developing a plan to stop unlawful absences and helping to reengage the student with the educational community before initial truancy episodes become embedded patterns of behavior.

### Two Programs that Promote Early Identification and Intervention

Lycoming County's **School Outreach Program** provides trained and experienced Children and Youth caseworkers assigned to all county school districts. The goal of the program is to provide preventative services, support services and short term intervention to students and their families to alleviate barriers that affect the student's academic and overall potential. The program provides trained and experienced Children and Youth caseworkers assigned to all county school districts who work directly in and with the schools, students and their families. The caseworkers have received Children and Youth core trainings as well as Student Assistance training. The program costs approximately \$300,000 per year for 6 workers serving 8 school districts and 675 families. Since the program's inception in 2007/2008, only 20% of the cases were referred to the magisterial district judge (MDJ). Of those referred to the MDJ, 2.5% were re-referred to the MDJ and for a formal children and youth referral. **Contact Information:** Lycoming County Children and Youth Services

*"No elementary child is truant. They want to go to school and the truancy is a symptom of underlying family issues. When we identify and correct the underlying issues, we will correct the truancy."* - Rick Saylor, Children's Services Director, Lycoming County Children and Youth Services

The Jefferson County **Truancy Diversion Project** in Louisville, Kentucky is a judicially-driven school and community initiative created to improve school attendance and to enhance family function and behavior. Initiated in 1997, this program brings the judge and community resources directly to the schools and students for a hands-on intervention. Now a national model, this program has far-reaching implications in the prevention of juvenile delinquent behavior and in the establishment and preservation of safe and permanent homes for children. *If a child comes to a court where there are allegations of abuse and neglect involving the parent, I want to look right away at school attendance. The absences reflect the voice of a child, a voice that can't say 'My Mom's boyfriend is an alcoholic and he beats her up at night.' What he's really saying is 'I didn't get any sleep, I couldn't get up in the morning and I had to stay home to protect my Mom. Those absences serve notice to court that there may be more than meets the eye.'* - Judge Joan Byer, Jefferson Family Court, Louisville Kentucky



- 3-2. *Develop a Truancy Elimination Plan immediately following the 3<sup>rd</sup> unlawful absence.* This plan should be developed with key stakeholders including the family and anyone the family identifies as important.
- 3-3. *Develop a continuum of timely responses.* Truancy must be seen as an urgent issue by responders at every point along the continuum. Protocols, policies and programs should focus on prevention and the earliest possible identification. If early intervention at the school level fails, specific guidelines regarding referrals to children and youth services and or the magisterial district court should be developed and implemented. If the court must become involved, judges should have an array of referral sources/services available to address the root causes of truancy and enhance school attendance.
- 3-4. *Examine truancy within the context of the “whole child”.* Likely, the act of truancy is symptomatic of a range of underlying individual and or family issues. It is important to address those underlying causes to ensure a child’s basic needs are met and to promote overall child wellbeing. An effective approach to truancy referrals by child serving agencies focuses on the needs of the “whole child” and the identification of family supports. Programs and practices that fully engage family and those who care about the child may be helpful.

#### **4. Track Truancy Data and Program Outcomes and Share Information with Stakeholders**

##### **Identified Concern:**

Gathering and sharing truancy data and information between and amongst stakeholders is rarely done. Most stakeholders are not aware of the number of truant students in their communities or how truancy impacts other areas such as dependency, delinquency, daytime crime, dropout rates, social service needs, community safety, the tax base, and employment. In addition, because of strict confidentiality laws and policies the inability to share data often becomes a significant barrier in reducing truancy.

##### **Description of the Concern:**

When systems do not gather, share or compare data it is difficult to determine whether or not a problem exists, the extent of the problem and what resources are needed to address it. Communities need to understand the local “picture” of data so outcomes can clearly be connected to community needs and service gaps can be filled. Sharing of data is also a way to strengthen collaborative efforts between stakeholders. In addition, data sharing can be used to correlate underlying needs of children/families experiencing truancy issues. The inability to share information poses a huge obstacle when trying to address the needs of the whole child.

## Recommendations:

### 4-1. *Identify critical data to be collected.*

Stakeholders must decide what types of attendance and truancy data already exist and what additional data is needed to understand the problem and target resources.

### 4-2. *Determine how attendance and truancy data will be collected, maintained, shared and disseminated.*

Centralizing and standardizing data collection helps to assure consistency and accessibility. Researching existing data collection instruments will assist in determining which instrument / tool will best meet the needs of the community.

### 4-3 *Employ creative strategies to share data.*

Convene a workgroup, led by The Pennsylvania Department of Education to develop recommendations and provide guidance surrounding a standard release of information form in order to overcome obstacles experienced in sharing information among stakeholders. Confidentiality need not pose an absolute barrier when sharing appropriate and relevant information among stakeholders and no barrier when sharing congregated, non-student identifying data.

### 4-4 *Use data to educate, inform and influence the community.*

Data is critical when attempting to educate and market the benefits of truancy prevention. Developing knowledge of truancy indicators, outcomes and correlations to community issues like economic stability, academic achievement levels, funding and employment success help the community understand the need to prioritize truancy prevention efforts.

#### Sharing Data to Prevent Truancy for an At-Risk Population

The Truancy Prevention Program in Dauphin County is a collaborative effort between Dauphin County Adult Probation (APO), Children and Youth Services (CYS) and the Harrisburg School District to provide prevention and intervention services to those students and siblings whose parents are either incarcerated or under supervision with Dauphin County Adult Probation/Parole. The school district identifies students who are at risk (5 or more unexcused absences) for truancy and verifies that the child's legal guardian is under supervision with APO. The probation officer meets with the client and the client signs a release of information. That release is shared with APO, School District and CYS. The APO then contacts the guidance counselor or social worker requesting a Truancy Elimination Plan meeting be scheduled. The probation officer, parent/ guardian, CYS, and other identified resources attend the TEP meeting and develop a plan to address the truancy and educate parents /guardians on the importance of making sure their child attends school. Based on the results of the TEP meeting, APO may recommend that a Family Group Decision Making Conference be held to ensure a family plan is put in place to prevent further truancy.

## 5. **Build Sustainable Funding Bases and Allocate Resources based on Data Informed Decisions and Partnerships that Maximize Efficiencies**

### Identified Concern:

Due to limited and or shrinking local, state and federal financial resources, developing and sustaining truancy programs independently can be challenging. Multiple systems often try to obtain funding from the same resources leading to a shortfall within those systems. In addition,



agencies or organizations working independently may result in a duplication of efforts and additional unneeded spending. Truancy is a multifaceted issue requiring multi-system planning and resourcing (including both financial and in-kind resources).

**Description of concern:**

When multiple systems act independently to address truancy issues it limits the availability of funds. As funding dollars from all arenas are continuing to diminish, local stakeholders have to pull resources together, utilize creative funding opportunities and draw on additional partners for help that they may not have considered in the past. In addition, grantors consider successful collaborative efforts and partnerships when determining whether or not to fund an initiative. Funds are often awarded to those who can demonstrate a true partnership exists between key stakeholders not only because it may strengthen the program components but it has a greater chance to maintain stability if key stakeholders are vested in the project. Finally, too often, “funding” is the resource upon which programs are developed or destroyed. Stakeholders should consider the wide range of resources available in a community to support truancy reduction efforts beyond financial supports.

**Recommendations:**

- 5-1 *Promote a true collaborative effort by deciding what resources are available and combining those resources to maximize the impact of federal, state and local dollars.* Collaboration with stakeholders not only provides an opportunity to combat truancy from a multi-faceted approach, but also allows partners to determine what resources are available, needed and can be combined to achieve a common goal.
- 5-2 *Engage local businesses, community, civic organizations, non-profit organizations, universities and the faith based community to identify both fiscal and in-kind resources.* Stakeholders are encouraged to reach out to businesses and organizations in the community to address the issue of truancy. Often times, monetary resources are not needed to implement a community response to truancy reduction. Local businesses and other organizations may welcome the opportunity to partner and contribute in-kind resources to assist in the success of children in their community.
- 5-3 *Research potential grant funding opportunities with local and national foundations.* Local and national foundations may be willing to assist in supporting truancy prevention or intervention programs. Most grant funding organizations look favorably on programs that promote true partnerships with stakeholders to not only demonstrate a collaborative effort but also to sustain a program once grant funds are depleted.
- 5-4 *Integrate truancy prevention into existing funding streams to include the needs based plan and budgeting process, integrated children’s services planning, Communities That Care and other initiatives.* Stakeholders are encouraged to be creative when deciding how to fund a truancy reduction program. It is important to examine what existing funding streams are available to determine how best to fund a program.

- 5-5** *Evaluate local truancy programs to determine effectiveness.* Utilize resources such as the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to evaluate and document the achievement and effectiveness of truancy prevention programs in Pennsylvania communities.

## Truancy Programs

There is no “one-size-fits-all” truancy reduction program. Whether the program is newly developed or integrates elements of proven practices, stakeholders must determine the needs, strengths and resources of the community and then decide how best to proceed. However, truancy programs should assess the needs of the entire child and not merely the truant behavior. The key to any successful truancy program is to treat the whole child and develop the awareness that truancy is symptomatic of a larger problem.<sup>12</sup>

There is a listing of critical program components for truancy programs put forth by the The National Center for School Engagement (July 2005) that is linked to positive outcomes for children and families (see **Attachment 4**). These components were identified as a result of the research and assessment worked conducted by the Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Center for School Engagement, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy and others.

### **The critical components are:**

1. Collaboration
2. Family Involvement
3. Comprehensive Approach
4. Use of Incentives and Sanctions
5. Development of a Supportive Context
6. Evaluation of the Program

Specifics regarding the elements contained within each of the components are included in Attachment 4.

Based on the information provided in this report, the many hours of committee discussion and evaluation, the following list provides examples of Pennsylvania and National truancy reduction programs that have demonstrated positive results. While not exhaustive, the list adds to those programs already identified in this report and provides potential strategies that have proven successful. Careful consideration should be used when selecting a specific program to meet a specific community need. At the same time, replication of complete programs or portions of programs may be useful in meeting a specific truancy need. General information is provided about the program along with contact information for the program. Where available, associated

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<sup>12</sup> A Model Response to Truancy Prevention: The Louisville Truancy Court Diversion Project. Judge Joan Byer and Jeffrey Kuhn Esq. Juvenile and family Court Journal Winter 2003



costs have been included in the description. The programs are not listed in any particular order of preference, as all have proven to be effective in their unique application.

#### Highlighted Pennsylvania County Programs

##### **Montgomery County – Norristown Truancy Abatement Initiative**

In 2006, Norristown Communities That Care, the Police Department, Norristown Area School District and community partners developed the Norristown Truancy Abatement Initiative (TAI). The goal of this program is to increase the access of all youth in Norristown Area School District to a quality education and to gain the skills, motivation, confidence and necessary credits to graduate high school and secure employment or higher education. The program objectives are to develop a model strategy to intervene with chronic truants, intervene in youth's progression from truancy into more serious, gang-related and violent behaviors, reduce the rates of daytime juvenile crime, and increase the graduation rate of at-risk youth. While the initial activities of the Initiative focused on enforcement, the TAI has evolved to combine efforts of numerous organizations and has a five pronged approach to reducing truancy: (1) Prevention; (2) Timely Intervention; (3) Enforcement; (4) Court Involvement and; (5) Community Education and Outreach. The school district has developed new policies and procedures to identify truant youth timely. Parents are notified of each unexcused absence immediately and a Truancy Elimination Plan is developed after the third unlawful absence which outlines corrective action and connects parents with community resources. The police department conducts continuous sweeps of the borough three times a week. Strategies used by the police department include apprehending youth on the street during school hours, conducting home to home sweeps of youth who are deemed absent without excuse by the home and school visitors and patrolling areas frequented by truant youth. Citations are issued to both the parent and the child for students age 13 and older. Citations are issued only for the parent if the child is under 13.

Through a partnership with the magisterial district judge, families are given alternatives to paying sizable fines which include attendance at parent education programs, tutoring, community service, participation in counseling (individual or family based), family center services, transportation to school, drug and alcohol assessment and other services that address the root causes of truancy. The TAI partners and school representatives are present at hearings. Every effort is made by the TAI team to resolve the truancy issue with the family. If the youth is not successful in reducing truancy behaviors, referrals are made to juvenile probation for children over 13 and children and youth services for children under 13.

A primary emphasis in this initiative has been to change the community norms related to school commitment as well as increasing the value of education. Strategies to accomplish this include environmental, social marketing and community education and outreach.

#### **Outcomes:**

The total number of daytime juvenile arrests has decreased 35% from 2006-2009. The number of students with chronic unexcused absences has also decreased. There has been a 51% reduction in chronically unexcused absences (20+ days) since 2006/2007. The rate of aggregate unexcused absences for Norristown Area School District decreased by 42% from 2005/2006

school year to the end of 2008/2009 school year. The total project budget costs for one year are approximately \$240,000.

**Contact Information**

<http://www.icnconnections.org/content/norristown-truancy-abatement-program>

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**Blair County – Truancy Court**

Truancy Court consists of a team of professionals that are identified as core supports in ensuring an adolescents success in achieving his/her educational goals. The team members include a magisterial district judge, school personal, children and youth services, juvenile probation office, Family Intervention Crisis Services, and, most importantly, the adolescent and their parents. The team meets biweekly for approximately a two to three hour period of time. The first hour is dedicated to staffing the progress of the adolescent. This is done in a positive strength based approach focusing on supporting small steps toward positive growth. This step is completed without the adolescent and parent in the room. The next step is to bring the adolescent and their families into court, which is held at the school, to applaud their success. This may be challenging at first because there may be little improvement, but by focusing on the strengths, adolescents soon start to feel a sense of pride in their success and strive to achieve higher goals. A unique component to this program is the integration of Family Functional Therapy (FFT). FFT, endorsed by “Blue Prints for Violence Prevention” is a nationally recognized blueprint program consisting of three goal oriented phases: engagement motivation, behavior change and generalization. The program targets adolescents ages 10-18 in families who are at risk for and/or presenting with parent/child conflict, delinquency, violence, substance abuse, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, or disruptive behavior disorder.

The combination of incorporating a positive, family engaging court practice coupled with with FFT has proven positive results in Blair County. The program is underway to expand efforts to more school districts in the 2010/2011 school year.

**Contact Information:** Blair County Children, Youth and Families 814-693-3130 / Blair County Juvenile Probation 814-693-3230

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**Lackawanna County – Stop Truancy and Really Succeed Program (S.T.A.R.S)**

The S.T.A.R.S. program was instituted in the 1990s. It is a community-based, cross systems collaborative created to address, reduce, and prevent truancy in Lackawanna County. Truancy has been identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, and truant students are considered to be at risk for many negative outcomes, including educational failure (expulsion or dropping out), social isolation, substance abuse, low self esteem and violence. If unaddressed, truancy can contribute to numerous problems during school years and into adulthood, as children who lack an education are often considered to be less desirable candidates for employment, which leads to financial hardship that can be difficult to remedy. The program strives to strengthen the relationship between the student and his/her family while simultaneously engaging the school so that students and families become actively involved in the educational process. All compulsory age students are targeted. Initial hearings are held in schools, with a magisterial district judge. Further contempt hearings are held before a common pleas judge, and cases are reviewed by court hearing masters. Cases are released from further



review once a pattern of compliance is shown by the student. **Contact Information:** Judy Lettieri [lettieri@lackawannacounty.org](mailto:lettieri@lackawannacounty.org).

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### **Washington County - Truancy Intervention Prevention Program (TIPP)**

Washington County has been utilizing the TIPP program since 2000. TIPP originated out of a Center for Safe Schools grant and currently serves as a Promising Practice in the Needs Base Plan and Budget costing approximately \$216,000 per year. TIPP is a contracted service that receives referrals directly from the identified school districts prior to children and youth involvement. The goal of the TIPP program is to intervene at the onset of truancy, identify issues as they arise early on and increase the attendance so that the child does not enter the formal child welfare and/or juvenile court system. Each child and the family are assessed to determine any underlying cause(s) of truancy. If identified, the TIPP worker will initiate any needed community services (i.e. mental health, drug and alcohol).

There is a strong teaming component with TIPP that brings the identified school staff, TIPP worker and children and youth caseworker to the table each week to discuss the assessment needs, inform on progress and determine any next steps. If the child's attendance is improving, the TIPP worker continues to monitor for an additional 90 days. If the child's attendance is not improving, a decision may be made to refer to Children and Youth Services for additional interventions.

### **Outcomes:**

TIPP has consistently shown strong outcomes for achieving identified goals, with an average success rate of 74% of the truancy issues being resolved and only 2% of those children entering the formal systems. It should be noted that an additional average of 24% include children moving out of the district, children withdrawing, children attending cyber school, children referred who were currently active with Juvenile Probation and referrals withdrawn by the school. **Contact Information:** Washington County Children and Youth Services, Christy Stanek [stanekc@co.washington.pa.us](mailto:stanekc@co.washington.pa.us)

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### Highlighted National Programs

**Colorado - Project Respect** <http://attendancetoolkit.org/programs/project-respect>

### **Contact Information:**

Pueblo School District #60

315 West 111<sup>th</sup> Street

Pueblo, CO 81003

719-549-7100

[www.pueblo60.k12.co.us](http://www.pueblo60.k12.co.us)

Terry Martinez-McGraw – [terri.martinez-mcgraw@pueblocitieschools.us](mailto:terri.martinez-mcgraw@pueblocitieschools.us)

**Description:**

Project Respect is a school-community collaboration between Pueblo's 60 schools and the community of Pueblo, Colorado. The goals of the program are to 1) improve school attendance for targeted students; 2) improve academic outcomes; 3) improve students' social-emotional lives; 4) increase student/family access to community services; and 5) decrease juvenile delinquency and recidivism. The program was implemented in Fall 2000 and uses a case management approach that targets children in 14 district schools who have exhibited difficulties in at least two of five areas – attendance (including excused absences), tardiness, poor behavior, suspensions and unexcused absences (truancy).

Community Advocates (all social workers) are present in all components of Project Respect and work in 14 schools to meet the needs of expelled and at-risk students and their families. Community Advocates (CA) meet students daily at school, weekly (or more) at home with the family, and do whatever is necessary to keep the student in school, engaged, and involved with pro-social activities. The CA serves as a link between the family, school, and local agencies to identify and match needed supports to prevent a pattern of truancy from appearing. Each CA works with 10 to 12 families at any given time. These supports help address some of the reasons that a student may be truant (from academic deficiencies to a lack of decent clothing to wear to school). Students are identified for the program by a Teacher Support Team that is active in each school. Identification is based on both emerging disciplinary issues, as well as which families would seem most receptive to help. Project Respect offers two additional components: a High School Proficiency Program (an intensive reading and language arts block for 30 students each day), and a mental health component that consists of a trained therapist who rotate through all the participating schools. There is also a six-week after school program called EASE-UP (Equine Assisted Suspension/Expulsion Uproot Program) where students attend group and individual therapy sessions which revolve around working with horses. Forty percent of all Project Respect students have participated in EASE-UP.

**Funding:**

Project Respect is funded through a variety of grant and school-based funding. The Colorado Department of Education and Pueblo School District 60 are the primary sources of funding, along with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Office of Juvenile Council. Funding for the mental health therapeutic component is often eligible for Medicaid reimbursement. The program is a collaboration between agencies and the juvenile court system with the County of Pueblo. Resources needed include each Community Advocates salary with benefits, training and mileage for advocates, incidental office supplies, incentives for youth, and support for an ongoing supervisory structure. Training for the Community Advocates should include case management, family advocacy, and supporting at-risk youth. Program start-up may take several months in budgeting, fund-raising, hiring and training.

**Evidence of Effectiveness:**

Sixty-one percent of the students with identified behavior concerns improved their behavior, as evidenced by reduced suspensions and office referrals. Grades improved for 139 (41%) of the students by an average of 12% in reading, 9% in math, and 12% in language arts. School



attendance improved for 258 (77%) of the students and there was a 75% success rate. This is a national model for truancy reduction.

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**Minnesota - Check & Connect** <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/default.html>

**Contact Information:**

**Ann Mavis**

Institute on Community Integration  
University of Minnesota  
150 Pillsbury Drive SE, 6 Pattee Hall  
Minneapolis MN 55455  
612-624-1489  
866-434-0010  
[checkandconnect@umn.edu](mailto:checkandconnect@umn.edu)

**Sandra L. Christenson, Ph.D.**

Birkmaier Professor of Educational Leadership  
School Psychology Program  
Department of Educational Psychology  
University of Minnesota  
344 Education Sciences Building  
56 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-624-0037  
[chris002@umn.edu](mailto:chris002@umn.edu)

**Description:**

Check & Connect was developed in 1990 at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration with input from researchers, practitioners, parents, and students. It is a model designed to encourage student engagement in school and learning through a comprehensive approach. Fundamental elements of the model include relationship building, routine observation of warning signs of withdrawal, individualized intervention, promotion of problem-solving skills, and encouragement of the student's participation in school activities.

The program has two main components: "Check" and "Connect." The Check component is designed to continually assess student engagement through close monitoring of student performance and progress indicators. The Connect component involves program staff giving individualized attention to students, in partnership with school personnel, family members and community service providers. Students enrolled in Check & Connect are assigned a monitor who regularly reviews their performance (in particular, whether students are having attendance, behavior, or academic problems) and intervenes when problems are identified. The monitor also advocates for students, coordinates services, provides ongoing feedback and encouragement, and emphasizes the importance of staying in school. The Check & Connect model has been used for

middle and high school students who have learning, emotional and behavioral disabilities. The model has also been used on chronically truant youth in elementary, middle and high schools.

**Cost:**

Estimates suggest the cost of implementing the Check & Connect model is approximately \$1,400 per student.

**Funding:**

The model was originally funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and was part of three projects addressing the problem of dropout for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. The program is currently being used in eight high schools in Minneapolis and is being funded by the Bush Foundation.

**Evidence of Effectiveness:**

One study conducted by Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow (2005) reported that Check & Connect students were significantly less likely, compared to a control group, to have dropped out of school at the end of the first follow-up year – 9% drop out rate compared with 30% drop out rate in the control group. At a fourth year follow-up, students who were in Check & Connect were significantly less likely to have dropped out of school compared to the original control group – 39% drop out rate compared with 58% drop out rate in the control group. This same study examined Check & Connect’s effect on whether students completed high school on time, defined as within four years of entering the ninth grade. The study indicated that there was no statistically significant or substantially important effect on on-time high school completion. Another study by Sinclair and colleagues (1998) reported that students in Check & Connect earned significantly more credits toward high school completion during ninth grade than students in the control group.



## Next Steps for the Truancy Workgroup

The Truancy Workgroup respectfully requests to continue its work and focus on the following during the coming year:

1. Implementation Strategies
  - a. Support for communities to implement the recommendations
  - b. Communicating the message about the urgency to address truancy
2. Collaborate with the Juvenile Court Judges Commission to identify truancy laws needing clarified or altered
3. Engage the medical community as a valued partner in addressing truancy at both the state and local levels
4. Explore possible surveys and other tools that communities can utilize to assess local truancy issues

## Conclusion

*“Facilitating and encouraging regular school attendance, and subsequent student achievement, may be viewed by some as the sole responsibility of the school system. The truth is that promoting the value, and necessity, of education for our youth is important for all of us. The most effective strategy for reducing truancy is possible when parents, schools, public agencies, the legal system, non-profit organizations, businesses and all members of the greater community understand the ramifications of truancy and strive together to make school a place in which all students desire to fully participate”.*

*~ Pennsylvania Truancy Toolkit*

Imagine the progress that could be made if a group of individuals and organizations endeavored to work together, making difficult choices and brokering significant compromises, to meet the problems of truancy head-on, change the culture around education and ensure regular school attendance for every child in their community.

Difficult, but not impossible.

The recommendations in this report were compiled after the Pennsylvania State Roundtable Truancy Workgroup members engaged in just such a process, determined to listen to each other, find common ground and work toward solutions which are both ideal and achievable.

Our task was to gather information and identify a set of recommendations and best practices that would work. We believe they *can* work. The test, however, ultimately lies in the commitment of community leaders to share responsibility and accountability to address challenging issues. We hope that leaders at all levels will recognize the urgency to address truancy *now*, and be inspired by this report and the commitment of our Workgroup members to swiftly and decisively implement these recommendations.

### Truancy Exploration Committee Survey Results

#### What We Asked:

#### **1. Do you believe truancy is an issue in your county?**

#### How They Answered:

5 of the 52 Counties who responded to the survey reported that truancy was *not* an issue in their county. The remaining 90% of counties reported that truancy was an issue. Of those that indicated truancy was *not* an issue reported the following reasons: collaboration with key stakeholders, uniform set of truancy guidelines used by all stakeholders and Children and Youth Caseworkers actively involved in the schools.

#### What We Asked:

#### **2. Do you believe truancy is being effectively handled in your county; if yes, what has your county done to effectively handle truancy? If no, in your opinion what are the 3 most significant barriers your county faces regarding truancy and what actions need to be taken to address those barriers**

#### How They Answered:

Yes	No	Yes and No	Did Not Answer
22	16	13	1

The counties that answered “yes” and “yes and no” stated the following practices are done to handle truancy effectively:

#### **Overall Themes**

- Working collaboratively with stakeholders
- Standard truancy protocol in place followed by all or most of the school districts in the county. Some counties reported developing protocols *with* schools.
- Effective truancy intervention and reduction programs
- MDJs use uniform method of sentences
- Children and Youth agency responding to truancy referrals timely

The counties that answered “no” and “yes and no” stated the following significant barriers:

#### **Overall Themes**

- No collaboration between stakeholders/ no coordination of efforts
- No consistency in handling truancy referrals among school districts
- Not addressing truancy in elementary schools
- School districts not filing truancy citations timely, too late in the school year
- Not utilizing the Truancy Elimination Plan



- MDJs have different policies when handling truancy cases
- Blanket medical note from Physicians
- Punishing parents instead of addressing the underlying issues

What We Asked:

**3. Does your county currently operate a cross systems truancy reduction program?**

How They Answered

Yes	No	Not Answered
17	34	1

What We Asked:

**4. Does your county have a truancy protocol?**

How They Answered

Yes	No
28	24

What We Asked:

**5. Does your county have a liaison between the school districts and the courts?**

How They Answered

Yes	No
18	34

What We Asked:

**6. Is there an educator or an educational system representative who actively participates on your roundtable?**

How They Answered

Yes	No	No Roundtable	No Answer
19	29	2	2

What We Asked:**1. Is there a Magisterial District Judge who actively participates on your roundtable?**How They Answered

Yes	No	No Roundtable	No Answer
5	44	2	1

What We Asked:

***In your opinion is there a sense of public urgency about truancy? If yes, what your county doing to support this urgency? If no, what might help create a sense of urgency in your county?***

How They Answered

Yes	No
17	35

## Yes:

- Stakeholders working collaboratively
- Regular cross systems meetings
- Developing intervention programs to address truancy

## No:

- Revise or redo truancy programs or policies
- Include MDJs and Educators on Local Children's Roundtable
- Involve Judges to help create a sense of urgency ~ judges involvement may help get Superintendents' and other stakeholders involved
- Need to make community aware of the issue in the county
- Identify and address underlying causes of truancy in elementary school
- Children and youth agency and school working more closely
- Statewide advertising campaign, possibly billboards in inner cities
- Media attention





## **24 P.S. 13-1327 Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan**

DATE OF ISSUE: August 8, 2006

DATE OF EXPIRATION: June 20, 2011

### **I. Introduction**

Educational success promotes workforce opportunity and development and builds a strong economic future for our state. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) goals are for every child to be known by name, be proficient or advanced in the core subjects, be graduates from high school, and achieve equitable outcomes regardless of background or 'condition.' The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is committed to improving school attendance rates. In order for students to realize the opportunities and benefits from school, students have to not only be in attendance, but they must also be meaningfully connected to the school and experiencing success. To achieve this, there must be a collaborative effort across agencies, both at the state level and locally, to work with students and families to address the source issues that result in truant behavior.

This BEC is the result of the work of the Statewide Task Force on School Attendance and Truancy Reduction, so magisterial district judges, parents, and schools will receive guidance on what they can do to help Pennsylvania's children. The Department of Education and the schools of the Commonwealth are obligated to comply with state and federal requirements for student attendance and truancy. As "No Child Left Behind" and the Pennsylvania Accountability System place increased emphasis on student achievement and attendance, it has become even more important to improve Pennsylvania's efforts to reduce truancy.

Development of this BEC has been driven by recommendations made by the Task Force to facilitate a consistent statewide response to truancy and absenteeism and for the development of a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies that involve collaboration among schools, law enforcement agencies, social services providers, as well as faith-based and youth-serving agencies. This BEC describes Pennsylvania law pertaining to pupil attendance and truancy and offers recommendations made by the PDE to encourage the adoption of proven truancy reduction efforts. This document also provides recommendations using national experience and best practices that have proven successful in reducing truancy.

There should be a common understanding among school personnel that the initial responsibility to address truancy rests with teachers, principals and guidance counselors. School districts are advised to develop creative and innovative approaches to ensure that children are active participants in their education. Every effort should be made to keep youth in school and reduce the school district's referrals to the courts, child welfare or juvenile justice systems in order to effectively intervene and eliminate truant behavior. Children are truant for many reasons and schools should seek to understand and address those issues. In Section IV (A)(3) of this BEC, the Department recommends that schools develop a Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) as a means to address truancy.

Section II of the BEC describes Pennsylvania's law on attendance; Section III provides guidance for schools to use in working with partners to prevent truancy; Section IV outlines the recommended policy on truancy for districts to adopt; Section V addresses proceedings and penalties for violation of compulsory attendance requirements; and Section VI addresses charter schools.



This BEC does not apply to first class school districts. The truancy procedures and programs of the School District of Philadelphia are developed and implemented by the district's Office of Transition and Alternative Education and the City of Philadelphia's Office of Truancy Prevention in the Department of Human Services.

## **II. Attendance**

### **A. Compulsory Attendance Requirements**

Compulsory school age refers to the period of a child's life from the time the child enters school as a beginner, which may be no later than eight years of age, until the age of seventeen or graduation from a high school, whichever occurs first. It is mandatory for all children of compulsory school age having a legal residence in Pennsylvania to attend a day school in which the subjects and activities prescribed by the Standards of the State Board of Education are taught in the English language, except in the following situations found in sections 1327, 1327.1, 1329, and 1330 of the Pennsylvania School Code:

1. Attendance at a private trade school or private business school continuously through the entire term congruent with the school term of the resident school district and that meets the requirements set forth by the State Board of Education or the State Board of Vocational Education when:
  - The child is 15 and has approval from the district superintendent and Secretary of Education, or
  - The child is 16 and has approval from the district superintendent.
2. Attendance at a school operated by a bona fide church or other religious body which provides a minimum of 180 days of instruction or 900 hours of instruction per year at the elementary level or 990 hours per year of instruction at the secondary level.
3. Privately tutored or home school students provided a minimum of 180 days of instruction or 900 hours of instruction per year at the elementary level or 990 hours per year of instruction at the secondary level.
4. Children who are 16 and regularly engaged in useful and lawful employment during the school session with a valid employment certificate. The Department of Education's opinion is that "regularly engaged" means 35 or more hours per week of employment.
5. Children who have been examined by an approved professional and identified to be unable to profit from further public school attendance and excused by the school board.
6. Children who are 15 who hold a permit approved by the school district to engage in farm work or domestic service in a private home.

7. Children who are 14 and satisfactorily completed the equivalent of the highest grade of elementary school in their district who hold a permit approved by the Secretary of Education to engage in farm work or domestic service in a private home.

## **B. Temporary Attendance Excuses**

Principals or teachers in any public, private, or other school may also excuse any child for non-attendance during temporary periods following their respective school district's policy and Pennsylvania law in excusing students. The board of school directors is required to adopt written policies governing pupil absences and excusals.

## **C. Categorizing Absences: What is Unlawful Absence from School?**

The school district is responsible for monitoring and maintaining records of the attendance of students. All absences should be treated as unlawful until the school district receives a written excuse explaining the reason(s) for an absence. Parents/guardians and students should submit the written explanation within three calendar days of the absence and should be informed that if they fail to provide a written excuse within three days of the absence, the absence would be permanently counted as unlawful. The PDE recommends that schools immediately inform parents in writing upon each incident of unlawful absence.

Pennsylvania law broadly defines absences as excused when a student is prevented from attendance for mental, physical, or other urgent reasons. Many school districts consider illness, family emergency, death of a family member, medical or dental appointments, authorized school activities, and educational travel with prior approval as the only lawful absences. An absence that should not be categorized as unlawful is one in which a student who is involved with the county children and youth agency or juvenile probation office is required to leave school for the purposes of attending court hearings related to their involvement with these agencies. It is the responsibility of each district to determine the validity of excuses and have clear written policies regarding absences.

Under Section 11.24, students who miss ten consecutive school days shall be dropped from the active membership roll unless the school is provided with evidence the excuse is legal or the school is pursuing compulsory attendance prosecution. Students of compulsory school age, who have not complied with compulsory attendance requirements, may be offered alternative education services or other provisions of education. Students are entitled to a free public education until the age of 21 years of age or until they receive a high school diploma, whichever occurs first.

## **D. Cumulative Lawful Absences**

A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days should require an excuse from a physician.



## **E. Reports of Attendance Public and Private Schools ( 24 PS 13-1332 and 1354)**

Every principal or teacher in a public or private school and every private teacher (tutor) is required to report at once to the superintendent, attendance officer, home and school visitor, or secretary of the board of school directors of the district, cases when a child of compulsory school age has been absent three days, or their equivalent, without a lawful excuse. The rationale of such reporting is to actively engage in cases of habitual truancy appropriately. A systemic response should be initiated only when a demonstrated pattern of truancy has been developed. If parents are neglectful in providing written excuses or do not meet such requirements in a timely fashion, reasonable allowances should be made to accept parent's explanations for their child's absences without initiating any punitive response.

## **III. Creating a Community Plan to Keep Children in School**

### **A. Informing Stakeholders**

Every school district should develop with their truancy reduction partners (e.g. parents, magisterial district judges, juvenile probation department, and county children and youth agency) comprehensive policies regarding attendance, absenteeism and truancy reduction. Updates should be distributed to all parties as soon as changes in policy take place. School district policies should be posted and available to the public and community organizations, including potential student employers.

The county-based integrated children's services team should be part of the development of any truancy reduction efforts including the development of policies related to school attendance. Partnerships with the judicial system and agencies or organizations that are concerned with truancy reduction are a critical linkage that school districts must develop. These stakeholders should assist in identifying student needs and potential family environments that contribute to high rates of absenteeism. The county children and youth agency is especially important in this regard. School districts that enlist the assistance of these agencies have had success at reducing truancy and building a community effort to emphasize the importance of keeping children in school.

### **B. The Role of Parents and Families**

Family involvement is essential to keeping children in school. Parents and/or families should play a key role in the development of policies. Establishing immediate positive and proactive personal contact with families from the time the school year starts is critical to developing a working partnership. In an effective school environment, parents and families are the school districts' best partners and should be approached as valuable resources in addressing a truancy issue. Section 11.41 (b) of State Board regulations provides that parents/guardians must be given copies of the district's attendance policy yearly and the Department suggests that copies be provided at the beginning of each year and to all new enrollees. It is important that such material is written in a way that is easily understood by all parents and translated when there are large populations of non-English speakers residing in the district. Parents and/or families should be provided with a list of community-based resources and a school representative that they can contact when they have concerns or issues related to their child's school attendance. To ensure that parents have dedicated the time necessary to understand the school's truancy policy, signature forms that acknowledge parental/guardian understanding of attendance policies are recommended.

School personnel designated to inform parents of truant behavior should approach parents as equal partners and express concern related to how the school can help address the reason the child is not attending school. It is important that information be shared with parents about the consequences and penalties associated with violation of state law and school board attendance requirements. This information should be shared in a factual, non-threatening manner. Schools should document and maintain a record of all communications, including telephone calls, written correspondence, and any other documents used.

### **C. The Role of the School and School District**

Teachers serve as a first line of defense against habitual absenteeism. It is important to involve teachers in the development of attendance expectations and district policy. Likewise, it is important to listen to observations made by teachers about students in their classes. Teachers should take an active role by meeting with students individually and contacting the parent or guardian to encourage better attendance. The district's Student Assistance Teams should be made aware of all instances of unlawful absences. Districts should be developing a team response at the elementary level, as well as at the secondary level. In many instances of truancy, there will be underlying issues of school safety, family health, substance abuse, or mental health problems. The Department strongly recommends that school districts take a proactive approach and work with parents and families to avoid having the child identified as a habitual truant.

### **D. Mandatory Employees – Attendance Officer or Home and School Visitor (24 PS 13-1341)**

First, second, and third class school districts are required to employ at least one person holding the title of attendance officer, or home and school visitor. (PDE issues Home School and Visitor certification only.) Many attendance officers also hold this certification but it is not mandatory. The employee is to enforce the provisions of the Pennsylvania School Code regarding compulsory attendance. These individuals have full police power without warrant, and may arrest or apprehend any child who fails to attend school in violation of compulsory attendance. State, municipal, port authority, transit authority, housing authority and school police officers are provided with the same arrest powers. Many districts have personnel with the title of school resource officer or district security officer; however, they are not empowered to arrest students for truancy. In cases where students are arrested or apprehended, the apprehending or arresting officer is required to promptly notify the parents, guardian, or person in parental relation and to place the child in the public school in which the child is, or should be, enrolled unless the parent, guardian, or person in parental relation requests placement in a school other than a public school. Certification by the PDE is required for all individuals employed as home and school visitors. School districts of the fourth class may also employ attendance officers or home and school visitors with the same powers and responsibilities. Districts may join in cooperative agreements to employ an attendance officer.

Whenever school personnel charged with overseeing attendance discover that any child of compulsory school age is unable to attend school due to the lack of necessary clothing or food, the case must be reported to any suitable relief agency operating in the school district. If a proper relief agency is not found in the district, the case should be referred to the proper county board of assistance for investigation and relief.



#### **IV. PDE Recommended School Responses to Unlawful Absences**

Habitual truancy negatively impacts a child's school performance and increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. An intensive and timely response to truancy is critical in those cases where a clear pattern of habitual truancy is evident. School districts shall not wait until a child has missed an excessive number of days before initiating a response, however, school districts should exercise caution and reason when utilizing punitive measures and involving other systems.

##### **A. PDE's Recommended Policy**

PDE recommends that a notice be sent to the parent/guardian after each unlawful absence. See Section IIC, page 3, for a definition of unlawful absence. Specific recommendations for each notice and step are found below. PDE recommends that unlawful absences do not trigger a formal response until the district has exhausted all efforts to work collaboratively with the parent/guardian to address the truancy of the student and until the student has three unlawful absences over the course of the school year. Schools are a critical part of a child's support system and have a significant opportunity to assist children and families.

##### **(1) First Unlawful Absence**

Parent/guardian receives a notice of unlawful absence from the school district. The legal penalties established by law for violation of compulsory attendance requirements should be attached to the notice (see sample notices in Attachment). In addition to stating the legal punishments, the name and telephone number of a school contact person shall be included. Parents are then able to contact a specific person to request assistance in resolving the child's truant behavior.

##### **(2) Second Unlawful Absence**

Parent/guardian receives a second notice of unlawful absence from the school district. Once again, the legal penalties established by law for violation of compulsory attendance requirements and the name and telephone number of a school contact person shall be included. Additionally, another offer of assistance should be made to the parent.

##### **(3) Third Unlawful Absence**

Parent/guardian receives a third notice of unlawful absence by certified mail providing "official notice of child's third illegal absence." Attached to this notice will be penalties for violation of compulsory attendance requirements as they pertain to both the student and the parent/guardian, including information that three days after giving such notice, the student or parent/guardian who again violates the compulsory attendance requirements shall be liable without further notice.

School districts shall coordinate a school/family conference to discuss the cause of the child's truancy and develop a mutually agreed upon Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) to resolve truant behavior. Issues to be reviewed at the school/family conference include the appropriateness of the child's educational environment, current academic difficulties, physical or behavioral health issues, and family/environment concerns. At the end of the conference all parties should sign a comprehensive TEP that is agreed to by the school representative, the child, and the parents and/or family. The plan could include accessing academic and social/health supports from the school and community organizations, an outline of family/parent and student responsibilities, and levels of performance monitoring that include rewards and consequences.

**(4) Subsequent Unlawful Absence**

After agreeing to a TEP, or if there is not agreement on a truancy elimination plan and 3 days have passed since the parent/guardian received the official notice of the child's third illegal absence, if a child is unlawfully absent, at any point within the school year, an official notice of unlawful absence will be sent home. The purpose of this correspondence is to inform the child's parent/guardian that the child has violated the TEP or, if there is not a TEP, to inform the child's parent/guardian that the child has again violated the compulsory attendance requirements, and advise the parent/guardian that a citation will immediately be sent to the magisterial district judge. To ensure the parent/guardian receives the notice, it is recommended that such a notice be sent through certified mail. After this step, the school is not obligated to inform parents in writing of absences but it is recommended that the school continue to call the parent/guardian to inform them of additional truant behavior. Schools should refer all future incidents of truancy directly to the magisterial district judge having jurisdiction in the region.

**(5) Referral to County Children and Youth Agency**

**(a) Children Under 13 Years of Age**

Any child who has not attained the age of 13 who fails to comply with the compulsory attendance requirements and is habitually truant, shall be referred by the school district to the local county children and youth agency for services, which may include addressing family issues that may be responsible for the child's truant behavior, or possible adjudication as a "dependent" child under the Juvenile Act. The referral to the county children and youth agency may be in addition to proceeding against the parent/guardian by sending the citation to the appropriate magisterial district judge or a school may decide to refer a family to the local county children and youth agency instead of sending a citation to the appropriate magisterial district judge. If the parent/guardian provides written consent, a copy of the TEP should be forwarded to the county children and youth agency.



**(b) Children 13 Years of Age and Older**

Any child who has attained the age of 13 who fails to comply with the compulsory attendance requirements and is habitually truant may, in lieu of being prosecuted (as described in Section V below), be referred by the school district to the local county children and youth agency for services, which may include addressing family issues that may be responsible for the child's truant behavior or, possible adjudication as a dependent child under the Juvenile Act.

**(c) Habitually Truant**

The School Code defines habitually truant as absence for more than three (3) school days or their equivalent following the first notice of truancy given after a child's third unlawful absence.

**B. Continued Truancy**

If a child of any age continues to be truant after the above actions have been taken, then school districts are encouraged to file citations with the local magisterial district judge citing the child's continued truancy on a weekly basis. It is imperative that the local magisterial district judge be kept informed if truant behavior continues after a plan is in place.

**V. Proceedings and Penalties for Violation of Compulsory Attendance Requirements ( 24 PS 13-1333 and 1338.1)**

**A. School Code**

Every parent/guardian of any child of compulsory school age is subject to penalties if compulsory school-age attendance requirements are not met. While school districts are required to give three days written notice of violation of compulsory attendance prior to proceeding against the offending party it is strongly recommended that school districts make a concerted effort to address the cause of a child's truant behavior before referring the child to another system.

Possible sentences for parents found to be in violation of compulsory attendance law:

- Paying a fine up to \$300 for each offense and court costs, or
- Completing a parenting education program, and
- In cases where the party convicted fails to pay the fine or complete the parenting education program, a subsequent sentencing to the county jail for no more than five days.
- Completing in lieu of, or in addition to the previous penalties, community service within the school district for a period of no more than six months.

(Magisterial district judges may suspend all or portions of the sentence if the child is no longer habitually truant.)

The board of school directors may bring a student before the court. Possible dispositions for children found in violation of compulsory attendance law:

1. If the parent/guardian is not convicted by the magisterial district judge because the parent/guardian took every reasonable step to insure the child's attendance at school and the child has attained the age of 13, the child may be:
  - subject to a fine of no more than \$300 for each offense, or
  - assigned to an adjudication alternative program pursuant to 42 Pa.C.S. § 1520, and
  - alleged to be dependent under 42 Pa.C.S. §6303(a)(1) by the magisterial district judge if the child fails to pay the fine or comply with the adjudication program.
  - referred by the school district for services or possible disposition as a dependent child as defined under 42 Pa.C.S. § 6302(5), in lieu of prosecution or assignment to an adjudication alternative program, if the child fails to comply with compulsory attendance provisions and is habitually truant.

(Magisterial district judges may suspend all or portions of the sentence if the child is no longer habitually truant.)

2. Any child who has not attained the age of 13 who fails to comply with the compulsory attendance requirements and is habitually truant, shall be:
  - Referred by the school district for services or possible adjudication as a dependent child as defined under 42 Pa.C.S. § 6302(5).
3. For children convicted of violation of compulsory attendance requirements by the magisterial district judge, the court, including a court not of record, must send a certified record of the conviction or other disposition to the Department of Transportation.
  - Upon first conviction, the child's operating privilege for operating an automobile will be suspended for 90 days.
  - Upon the second or subsequent conviction, the child's operating privileges will be suspended for six months.
  - Children who do not yet have a driver's license will be ineligible to apply for a license for the time periods of 90 days for the first conviction and six months for the second and any subsequent conviction.
4. If a student of compulsory school age cannot be kept in school on account of truancy, the school district may proceed against the student before the juvenile court.

#### **B. Further corrective measures for violation of compulsory attendance**

General protective services are defined as services to prevent the potential for harm to a child. Under Title 55 Pa Code, Chapter 3490.223, children who are habitually and without justification truant from school while subject to compulsory school attendance are subject to an assessment to determine if there is a need for general protective services. Children shall not be referred to the county children and youth agency for assessment as possibly needing services until after the school district has made a formal effort to involve the family and child in resolving the cause of the truant behavior.



## **VI. Charter Schools**

### **A. Charter School Responsibilities**

Charter schools must report to the student's school district of residence when a student has accrued three or more days of unlawful absences. It is the responsibility of the school district to enforce the compulsory attendance laws in accordance with the Public School Code. However, charter schools should also follow PDE's Recommended Responses to Unlawful Absences for the first, second and third unlawful absences including the school/family meeting and implementation of a TEP. Charter schools should also refer the child to the county children and youth agency as stated in Section V above.

### **B. School District Response to Charter School Absences**

Under compulsory attendance laws, the parents/guardians of a student who has accumulated three unlawful absences are to receive notice stating any subsequent unlawful absences will result in a citation being filed with the magisterial district judge. The school district of residence should send the notice to parents/guardians immediately upon notification of the third unlawful absence by a charter school. It is recommended that such notice be sent through certified mail. Future unlawful absences should be filed with the magisterial district judge.

For brick and mortar charter schools, a school district may file truancy documents with the magisterial district judge in whose jurisdiction the charter school is located, which is where the cause of action arose, or where the charter school student resides, which is where the parent/guardian may be served. For cyber charter schools, a school district may file truancy documents with the magisterial district judge in whose jurisdiction the charter school student resides, which is where the cause of action arose and where the parent/guardian may be served. Charter schools and cyber charter schools must cooperate with school districts by providing necessary documentation for the truancy filings, and attending the hearings to provide testimony, if necessary.

## **REFERENCES:**

### **Purdon's Statutes**

24 PS §13-1326  
24 PS §13-1327  
24 PS §13-1329  
24 PS §13-1330  
24 PS §13-1332  
24 PS §13-1333  
24 PS §13-1334  
24 PS §13-1338  
24 PS §13-1338.1  
24 PS §13-1339  
24 PS §13-1341  
24 PS §13-1343  
24 PS §13-1354

The Juvenile Act- 42 Pa.C.S. §§ 6301- 6365

**Public Welfare Regulations**

**[55 Pa. Code § 3490.223](#)**

**State Board of Education Regulations**

**[22 Pa. Code §11.34](#)**

**[22 Pa. Code §11.41](#)**

**ATTACHMENTS:**

(Note: PDF files require Acrobat Reader)

**[Sample parent notification letters \(PDF\)](#)**

**[Sample Truancy Elimination Plan \(PDF\)](#)**



### **School-Family Conference and Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP)**

The Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP), as described in Section IV (A)(3) BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327, is designed to serve as guidance. The TEP is developed cooperatively with involved stakeholders through a school-family conference, which is required upon the school's notice to the student's parent/guardian upon the third unlawful absence. Teachers are the first line of defense for compulsory attendance, as they are the first to recognize students with possible attendance issues. Therefore, teachers should implement a plan of action including (but not limited to):

- Sharing and reviewing school policy on attendance and student responsibilities with students and families;
- Contacting the student's parent/guardian upon his/her absence;
- Meeting individually with students to discuss reason(s) for absence;
- Following up with the building principal (or assigned truant officer);
- Making referrals to guidance counselors and;
- Collaborating with Student Assistance Teams as appropriate.

Pursuant to the BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327, schools are required to notify the parent/guardian regarding the need for a joint conference upon the third unlawful student absence. The school-family conference engages all participants involved in the student's life to explore possible solutions to increase the student's school attendance. Maintaining open communication between the student and adults will facilitate positive outcomes.

The purpose of the school-family conference is to discuss the cause(s) of the truancy and to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to assure regular school attendance. The school-family conference provides both parties with the opportunity to identify, understand and explore all issues contributing to the student's truant behavior. Participation by the student and family is an integral component for this conference. In addition, representatives from relevant and/or involved community-based agencies, community and school services, and school personnel should be invited to participate. During the school-family conference, a Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) shall be developed cooperatively with the student and other meeting participants as described in Section IV (A)(3) BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327. A sample TEP is located at the end of this document and can be used as a guide for schools when developing their own plan format.

Issues to be addressed at the school-family conference should include but not be limited to:

- Appropriateness of the student's educational environment;
- Possible elements of the school environment that inhibit student success;
- Student's current academic level and needs;
- Social, emotional, physical, mental and behavioral health issues;

- Issues concerning family and home environment and;
- Any other issues affecting the student's attendance.

The participants in the school-family conference should work collaboratively to conduct a holistic assessment to determine the reason(s) the student is exhibiting truant behavior. Every member should have a vested interest in and responsibility for determining an appropriate plan to assist the student to succeed both socially and academically. This school-family conference also provides an opportunity to ensure that both the student and the family clearly understand the legal ramifications of not adhering to the state's compulsory attendance requirements. This methodology promotes full understanding and appreciation of the root causes of truancy as well as the resultant personal and societal impacts when truant behavior is not adequately addressed. The primary goal of the school-family conference is the development of a comprehensive TEP which is understood by, agreed upon and supported by the student, the parent/guardian, the school representatives and all other conference participants. The TEP should include but not be limited to the following components as appropriate:

- Identification and provision of appropriate academic supports by the school and/or community organization(s);
- Identification and provision of appropriate social, emotional, physical, mental and behavioral health supports from the school and/or community organization(s);
- Identification of the school environment issues that affect the student's success and solutions to address these issues;
- Explanation of the student's strengths and responsibilities related to the TEP;
- Explanation of the family's strengths and responsibilities related to the TEP;
- Clarification of method(s) used for monitoring the effectiveness of the TEP;
- Explanation of the consequences for each stakeholder if the TEP is not fully implemented;
- Discussion of the benefits for successfully implementing the TEP;
- Following up and reporting the outcome of the TEP.

The TEP substantiates efforts made by the school, the family and other vested third parties to assist the student in addressing and resolving school attendance issues. This comprehensive system of supports and services provides documentation of the "good faith" effort between the school and the student's family should future action be required (e.g. citation to the magisterial district judge and referral to the county children and youth agency upon the fourth unexcused absence).

### **Directions to complete the Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP)**

The TEP should be completed at the school-family conference. The school administrator should complete the TEP in collaboration with other conference participants. Participants should include, but are not limited to: student, parent/guardian, other relevant family members, school staff, partner organizations, community-based organizations and other agencies involved with family (e.g. Children and Youth, Juvenile Probation.). To identify and resolve root causes of truancy, all members should contribute their unique knowledge about the student and his/her environment to group discussion. Only then can meaningful results be achieved.

#### **Directions**

- 1. Goal: Increase** (insert student's name) **school attendance.**
- 2. Date:** Enter the date when TEP is being completed
- 3. Student Information (enter the following):**
  - a. Name of the student (First M. Last)
  - b. Birth date (mm/dd/yyyy)
  - c. Gender (male/female)
  - d. Grade Level (K-12)
  - e. Home Address
  - f. Home Phone Number
  - g. Special Needs (include any special needs identified through an IEP, and/or other accommodations not mandated by IEP, etc.)
  - h. Health Concerns (these can be identified by student, parent/guardian, school staff, and others)
- 4. School Information (enter the following):**
  - a. Name of School
  - b. School Address
  - c. Phone Number(s)
  - d. Principal's Name
  - e. Referring Teacher's Name
  - f. Email address/es (can be provided to ensure ongoing communication)
- 5. Parent/Guardian Information (enter the following):**
  - a. Name
  - b. Home Address
  - c. Home Phone Number
  - d. Work Address
  - e. Work Phone Number
  - f. Email address(es) (can be provided to ensure ongoing better communication)



**6. Absence (enter the following):**

- a. Dates of each absence
- b. Whether or not an excuse was provided
- c. Reason(s) for each absence
- d. Action taken by the school on each incident of absence
- e. Provide meaningful information for future reference, including the name of the person taking the action, the date action was taken and any other relevant information.

**7. Assessment (enter the following):**

- a. Identify root cause/s of the truancy. It is crucial (yet sometimes overlooked) to build rapport with the student. This dialogue benefits all involved parties.
  - i. Student: academic, social, physical, mental, behavioral health issues
  - ii. Parent/Guardian: home environment, work schedules, unsupervised time for student, special circumstances, etc.
  - iii. School: school environment, student's interaction with other adults and with other students, school schedule, etc.
- b. Consider possible solutions:
  - i. These may include maximizing programs and services available in the school or community to involve the student.
  - ii. They could include pairing the student with a mentor (family member, teacher, school staff, community businesses, etc.)
  - iii. They may involve coordination of services to student and/or family to address health, social or financial issues.
  - iv. They may include activities intended to build self-esteem or confidence (e.g. the student may be asked to tutor elementary school students for some type of credit).
- c. Responsible party (enter the following):
  - i. Name of the person/agency that will take ownership for each stated solution (will ensure that the action step is completed).
  - ii. Contact information for each person/agency listed (to assist in monitoring/follow up).

**8. Strengths (enter the following):**

- a. Identify the strengths of the student, family and the school to support the goal of increasing attendance for the student.
- b. Relate each strength to the plan's overall goal.
  - i. For example: If the student reads well, a solution could be the student tutoring elementary students. This engages the older student in a meaningful activity, increases confidence, and supports his/her sense of responsibility by tutoring a younger student, thereby regular school attendance and academic success of both the older and younger student.

- ii. If the student has plans for employment or further schooling after high school graduation, then appropriate activities could include:
      - 1. Discussing the ramifications of any future absences and how they could negatively impact those future plans.
      - 2. Pairing the student with a business member in the field that interests the student. This may help the student to understand the relevance of what he/she is learning in school and future endeavors.
    - iii. If the student has a single parent who works in the evening, leaving the student unsupervised, an appropriate action step could be to have a neighbor, extended family member or other adult either stay with the student or be in contact with the student during the parent's absence.
    - iv. If the student values school and the absences occurred three days in a row, then perhaps this was an isolated incident. However, it should be made clear that consequences for the fourth absence will result in a citation to the magisterial district judge and referral to the county children and youth agency.
  - 9. **Consequences for Non-compliance:** Outline consequences for the student, parent/guardian, school, and other participants if they do not follow-through with the recommendations of the TEP and the BEC.
  - 10. **Benefits for Compliance:** Benefits could include better grades for the student, graduation, higher graduation rates for the school, more involved community members, improved self-esteem, better relationship with parent/s and other adults, etc.
  - 11. **Signatures:** The student, parent, and school official will sign and date the TEP as verification that all parties understand and agree to all components of the TEP.
  - 12. **Outcome Meeting:** With school-family participants present, a follow up meeting will be scheduled. At that time each responsible party listed in the Solutions section will report on the progress of their area of responsibility.
  - 13. **Outcome:** The group members will list the outcome(s) of the TEP and outline Next Steps, if any.
  - 14. **Signatures:** The student, parent/guardian, and school official will again sign and date the TEP.
- A copy of the TEP will be retained in the student's file.
  - A copy of the TEP must be provided to the:
    - student
    - parent/guardian
    - appropriate school personnel

## Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:** Increase *(Insert Student's Name)* school attendance.

<u><b>Name of Student</b></u>  <u><b>Date of Birth</b></u>  <u><b>Gender</b></u>  <u><b>Grade Level</b></u>	Address   Phone Number	<u><b>Special Needs</b></u>  Health Concerns
<u><b>Name of School</b></u>	Address  Phone Number	<u><b>Principal's Name</b></u>  <u><b>Referring Teacher's Name</b></u>
<u><b>Name of Parent/Guardian</b></u>	Home Address  Home Phone Number	Work Address  Work Phone Number

Date of Absence	Written Excuse Provided? (Y/N)	Reason(s) for Absence	Action Taken (e.g. Parent Letter 1 sent out on 04/01/2006, John Doe called parent, Mrs. Smith to discuss
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			



**Assessment**

Description	Solution(s)	Responsible Party
1.		
2.		
3.		

**Strengths**

Description	Relevance to the Plan
1.	
2.	
3.	

**Solutions**

Description	Responsible Party(ies)	Completion Date
1.		
2.		
3.		

Consequences for non-compliance
1.
2.
3.

Benefits for compliance
1.
2.
3.

This TEP was created collaboratively to assist the student in improving attendance, to enlist the support of parent/guardian and to document the school's attempts to provide resources to promote student success.

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Official:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

cc: student \_\_\_\_ (initial upon receipt)  
parent/guardian \_\_\_\_ (initial upon receipt)  
school personnel \_\_\_\_ (initial upon receipt)  
other \_\_\_\_ (initial upon receipt)

Date for Follow-up Outcomes Meeting:

--

***Outcomes:***

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***Next Steps:***

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Official:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**In order for agencies outside of the school district to assist with this plan, your permission is needed to release the plan to the following:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign below:**

**Parent or Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Truancy - Data: 2007-2009

AOPC

Attachment 3

County	Total Citations Filed Per Year			% Change: 2007-08	% Change: 2008-09	% Change: 2007-09	3 Year Average
	2007	2008	2009				
Adams	588	534	261	-9%	-51%	-100%	461
Allegheny	8,781	8,540	8,361	-3%	-2%	-5%	8,561
Armstrong	396	440	321	11%	-27%	-19%	386
Beaver	707	698	577	-1%	-17%	-18%	661
Bedford	100	235	151	135%	-36%	51%	162
Berks	9,095	9,854	7,729	8%	-22%	-15%	8,893
Blair	528	592	465	12%	-21%	-12%	528
Bradford	294	317	270	8%	-15%	-8%	294
Bucks	1,257	1,049	1,059	-17%	1%	-16%	1,122
Butler	489	587	643	20%	10%	31%	573
Cambria	389	615	451	58%	-27%	16%	485
Cameron	31	12	39	-61%	225%	26%	27
Carbon	891	1,204	721	35%	-40%	-19%	939
Centre	694	507	499	-27%	-2%	-28%	567
Chester	3,639	3,388	3,109	-7%	-8%	-15%	3,379
Clarion	194	184	111	-5%	-40%	-43%	163
Clearfield	269	349	271	30%	-22%	1%	296
Clinton	126	200	115	59%	-43%	-9%	147
Columbia	338	251	298	-26%	19%	-12%	296
Crawford	245	249	170	2%	-32%	-31%	221
Cumberland	1,947	1,892	1,475	-3%	-22%	-24%	1,771
Dauphin	1,837	1,923	790	5%	-59%	-57%	1,517
Delaware	2,041	2,167	1,441	6%	-34%	-29%	1,883
Elk	149	183	135	23%	-26%	-9%	156
Erie	1,382	2,042	2,482	48%	22%	80%	1,969
Fayette	1,503	1,369	989	-9%	-28%	-34%	1,287
Forest	2	1	5	-50%	400%	150%	3
Franklin	700	1,012	707	45%	-30%	1%	806
Fulton	60	95	117	58%	23%	95%	91
Greene	332	395	393	19%	-1%	18%	373
Huntingdon	52	30	33	-42%	10%	-37%	38
Indiana	138	123	108	-11%	-12%	-22%	123
Jefferson	171	244	111	43%	-55%	-35%	175
Juniata	172	135	172	-22%	27%	0%	160
Lackawanna	1,539	1,173	677	-24%	-42%	-56%	1,130
Lancaster	2,601	2,601	2,130	0%	-18%	-18%	2,444
Lawrence	165	271	212	64%	-22%	28%	216
Lebanon	1,686	2,198	1,741	30%	-21%	3%	1,875
Lehigh	3,756	3,019	2,763	-20%	-8%	-26%	3,179
Luzerne	948	1,116	698	18%	-37%	-26%	921
Lycoming	415	356	285	-14%	-20%	-31%	352
McKean	270	202	281	-25%	39%	4%	251
Mercer	603	618	460	2%	-26%	-24%	560
Mifflin	335	251	179	-25%	-29%	-47%	255
Monroe	801	712	459	-11%	-36%	-43%	657
Montgomery	1,049	1,930	1,139	84%	-41%	9%	1,373
Montour	69	53	13	-23%	-75%	-81%	45
Northampton	1,257	1,359	828	8%	-39%	-34%	1,148
Northumberland	1,133	647	456	-43%	-30%	-60%	745
Perry	345	296	193	-14%	-35%	-44%	278
Pike	143	128	81	-10%	-37%	-43%	117
Potter	23	21	14	-9%	-33%	-39%	19
Schuylkill	1,115	1,100	889	-1%	-19%	-20%	1,035
Snyder	211	150	152	-29%	1%	-28%	171
Somerset	478	396	246	-17%	-38%	-49%	373
Susquehanna	92	84	84	-9%	0%	-9%	87
Tioga	30	71	35	137%	-51%	17%	45
Union	124	64	43	-48%	-33%	-65%	77
Venango	146	157	181	8%	15%	24%	161
Warren	605	649	329	7%	-49%	-46%	528
Washington	985	1,176	937	19%	-20%	-5%	1,033
Wayne	84	55	15	-35%	-73%	-82%	51
Westmoreland	740	714	625	-4%	-12%	-16%	693
Wyoming	80	57	76	-29%	33%	-5%	71
York	4,942	5,006	6,755	1%	35%	37%	5,568
<b>Total</b>	<b>66,307</b>	<b>68,046</b>	<b>57,555</b>				
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1,047</b>	<b>885</b>				
<b>Median</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>321</b>				
<b>3 Year Average</b>			<b>984</b>				
<b>3 Year Median</b>			<b>396</b>				

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Truancy - Data: 2007-2009

Attachment 3

AOPC

County	Adult (includes those where no birthdate was listed on the citation)			% Change Adult 2007-08	% Change Adult 2008-09	% Change Adult 2007-09	3 Year Average
	2007	2008	2009				
Adams	519	468	219	-10%	-53%	-58%	402
Allegheny	5,823	5,414	5,312	-7%	-2%	-9%	5,516
Armstrong	206	159	133	-23%	-16%	-35%	166
Beaver	472	482	377	2%	-22%	-20%	444
Bedford	58	121	79	109%	-35%	36%	86
Berks	7,968	8,444	4,939	6%	-42%	-38%	7,117
Blair	348	337	244	-3%	-28%	-30%	310
Bradford	242	262	224	8%	-15%	-7%	243
Bucks	750	586	651	-22%	11%	-13%	662
Butler	392	487	511	24%	5%	30%	463
Cambria	298	527	383	77%	-27%	29%	403
Cameron	20	12	22	-40%	83%	10%	18
Carbon	575	887	489	54%	-45%	-15%	650
Centre	437	369	350	-16%	-5%	-20%	385
Chester	2,132	1,925	1,725	-10%	-10%	-19%	1,927
Clarion	166	170	105	2%	-38%	-37%	147
Clearfield	158	198	150	25%	-24%	-5%	169
Clinton	107	175	107	64%	-39%	0%	130
Columbia	299	222	274	-26%	23%	-8%	265
Crawford	211	184	105	-13%	-43%	-50%	167
Cumberland	1,626	1,667	1,274	3%	-24%	-22%	1,522
Dauphin	1,180	1,243	513	5%	-59%	-57%	979
Delaware	1,615	1,816	1,273	12%	-30%	-21%	1,568
Elk	91	135	111	48%	-18%	22%	112
Erie	944	1,080	1,571	14%	45%	66%	1,198
Fayette	1,182	1,000	860	-15%	-14%	-27%	1,014
Forest	2		5	-100%	--	150%	4
Franklin	493	794	629	61%	-21%	28%	639
Fulton	57	92	111	61%	21%	95%	87
Greene	191	239	238	25%	0%	25%	223
Huntingdon	44	26	29	-41%	12%	-34%	33
Indiana	120	122	103	2%	-16%	-14%	115
Jefferson	91	133	61	46%	-54%	-33%	95
Juniata	148	114	155	-23%	36%	5%	139
Lackawanna	1,189	1,022	573	-14%	-44%	-52%	928
Lancaster	2,281	2,253	1,948	-1%	-14%	-15%	2,161
Lawrence	136	190	118	40%	-38%	-13%	148
Lebanon	1,628	2,145	1,654	32%	-23%	2%	1,809
Lehigh	2,612	2,150	1,840	-18%	-14%	-30%	2,201
Luzerne	607	675	438	11%	-35%	-28%	573
Lycoming	297	224	180	-25%	-20%	-39%	234
McKean	231	194	267	-16%	38%	16%	231
Mercer	349	379	271	9%	-28%	-22%	333
Mifflin	324	243	175	-25%	-28%	-46%	247
Monroe	276	366	267	33%	-27%	-3%	303
Montgomery	540	1,363	721	152%	-47%	34%	875
Montour	57	49	12	-14%	-76%	-79%	39
Northampton	748	768	538	3%	-30%	-28%	685
Northumberland	686	355	237	-48%	-33%	-65%	426
Perry	314	218	154	-31%	-29%	-51%	229
Pike	142	126	74	-11%	-41%	-48%	114
Potter	21	15	14	-29%	-7%	-33%	17
Schuylkill	445	510	393	15%	-23%	-12%	449
Snyder	201	134	136	-33%	1%	-32%	157
Somerset	124	118	89	-5%	-25%	-28%	110
Susquehanna	62	64	59	3%	-8%	-5%	62
Tioga	22	59	30	168%	-49%	36%	37
Union	82	49	31	-40%	-37%	-62%	54
Venango	129	122	104	-5%	-15%	-19%	118
Warren	571	570	287	0%	-50%	-50%	476
Washington	492	655	466	33%	-29%	-5%	538
Wayne	84	55	15	-35%	-73%	-82%	51
Westmoreland	455	477	401	5%	-16%	-12%	444
Wyoming	71	51	65	-28%	27%	-8%	62
York	4,314	4,398	6,149	2%	40%	43%	4,954
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,455</b>	<b>49,887</b>	<b>41,038</b>				
<b>Average</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>779</b>	<b>631</b>				
<b>Median</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>238</b>				
<b>3 Year Average</b>			<b>718</b>				
<b>3 Year Median</b>			<b>269</b>				

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Truancy - Data: 2007-2009

Attachment 3

AOPC

County	Juvenile			% Change Juvenile 2007- 08	% Change Juvenile 2008-09	% Change Juvenile 2007- 09	3 Year Average
	2007	2008	2009				
Adams	69	66	42	-4%	-36%	-39%	402
Allegheny	2,958	3,126	3,049	6%	-2%	3%	5,516
Armstrong	190	281	188	48%	-33%	-1%	166
Beaver	235	216	200	-8%	-7%	-15%	444
Bedford	42	114	72	171%	-37%	71%	86
Berks	1,127	1,410	2,790	25%	98%	148%	7,117
Blair	180	255	221	42%	-13%	23%	310
Bradford	52	55	46	6%	-16%	-12%	243
Bucks	507	463	408	-9%	-12%	-20%	662
Butler	97	100	132	3%	32%	36%	463
Cambria	91	88	68	-3%	-23%	-25%	403
Cameron	11		17	-100%	--	55%	18
Carbon	316	317	232	0%	-27%	-27%	650
Centre	257	138	149	-46%	8%	-42%	385
Chester	1,507	1,463	1,384	-3%	-5%	-8%	1,927
Clarion	28	14	6	-50%	-57%	-79%	147
Clearfield	111	151	121	36%	-20%	9%	169
Clinton	19	25	8	32%	-68%	-58%	130
Columbia	39	29	24	-26%	-17%	-38%	265
Crawford	34	65	65	91%	0%	91%	167
Cumberland	321	225	201	-30%	-11%	-37%	1,522
Dauphin	657	680	277	4%	-59%	-58%	979
Delaware	426	351	168	-18%	-52%	-61%	1,568
Elk	58	48	24	-17%	-50%	-59%	112
Erie	438	962	911	120%	-5%	108%	1,198
Fayette	321	369	129	15%	-65%	-60%	1,014
Forest	-	1	-	--	-100%	--	4
Franklin	207	218	78	5%	-64%	-62%	639
Fulton	3	3	6	0%	100%	100%	87
Greene	141	156	155	11%	-1%	10%	223
Huntingdon	8	4	4	-50%	0%	-50%	33
Indiana	18	1	5	-94%	400%	-72%	115
Jefferson	80	111	50	39%	-55%	-38%	95
Juniata	24	21	17	-13%	-19%	-29%	139
Lackawanna	350	151	104	-57%	-31%	-70%	928
Lancaster	320	348	182	9%	-48%	-43%	2,161
Lawrence	29	81	94	179%	16%	224%	148
Lebanon	58	53	87	-9%	64%	50%	1,809
Lehigh	1,144	869	923	-24%	6%	-19%	2,201
Luzerne	341	441	260	29%	-41%	-24%	573
Lycoming	118	132	105	12%	-20%	-11%	234
McKean	39	8	14	-79%	75%	-64%	231
Mercer	254	239	189	-6%	-21%	-26%	333
Mifflin	11	8	4	-27%	-50%	-64%	247
Monroe	525	346	192	-34%	-45%	-63%	303
Montgomery	509	567	418	11%	-26%	-18%	875
Montour	12	4	1	-67%	-75%	-92%	39
Northampton	509	591	290	16%	-51%	-43%	685
Northumberland	447	292	219	-35%	-25%	-51%	426
Perry	31	78	39	152%	-50%	26%	229
Pike	1	2	7	100%	250%	600%	114
Potter	2	6		200%	-100%	-100%	17
Schuylkill	670	590	496	-12%	-16%	-26%	449
Snyder	10	16	16	60%	0%	60%	157
Somerset	354	278	157	-21%	-44%	-56%	110
Susquehanna	30	20	25	-33%	25%	-17%	62
Tioga	8	12	5	50%	-58%	-38%	37
Union	42	15	12	-64%	-20%	-71%	54
Venango	17	35	77	106%	120%	353%	118
Warren	34	79	42	132%	-47%	24%	476
Washington	493	521	471	6%	-10%	-4%	538
Wayne				--	--	--	51
Westmoreland	285	237	224	-17%	-5%	-21%	444
Wyoming	9	6	11	-33%	83%	22%	62
York	628	608	606	-3%	0%	-4%	4,954
Total	17,852	18,159	16,517				
Average	279	288	262				
Median	104	132	104				
3 Year Average			276				
3 Year Median			111				



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Truancy - Data: 2007-2009

Attachment 3

AOPC

County	Juvenile Certified to Common Pleas Court for Failure to Pay Truancy Fines			% Change Certifications: 2007-08	% Change Certifications: 2008-09	% Change Certifications: 2007-09	3 Year Average
	2007	2008	2009				
Adams	42	29	14	-31%	-52%	-67%	28
Allegheny	809	928	679	15%	-27%	-16%	805
Armstrong	21	20	5	-5%	-75%	-76%	15
Beaver	37	52	23	41%	-56%	-38%	37
Bedford	3	5		67%	-100%	-100%	4
Berks	298	319	313	7%	-2%	5%	310
Blair	43	48	37	12%	-23%	-14%	43
Bradford	10	8	2	-20%	-75%	-80%	7
Bucks	101	48	26	-52%	-46%	-74%	58
Butler	8	4	2	-50%	-50%	-75%	5
Cambria	28	9	4	-68%	-56%	-86%	14
Cameron	3			-100%	--	-100%	3
Carbon	8	18	11	125%	-39%	38%	12
Centre	8			-100%	--	-100%	8
Chester	395	487	323	23%	-34%	-18%	402
Clarion	3		1	-100%	--	-67%	2
Clearfield	9	20	16	122%	-20%	78%	15
Clinton	5	10	1	100%	-90%	-80%	5
Columbia	31	15	11	-52%	-27%	-65%	19
Crawford	4	18	19	350%	6%	375%	14
Cumberland	55	18	17	-67%	-6%	-69%	30
Dauphin	28	31	10	11%	-68%	-64%	23
Delaware	122	86	43	-30%	-50%	-65%	84
Elk	19	18	3	-5%	-83%	-84%	13
Erie	69	128	54	86%	-58%	-22%	84
Fayette	122	106	45	-13%	-58%	-63%	91
Forest				--	--	--	--
Franklin	12	42	11	250%	-74%	-8%	22
Fulton				--	--	--	--
Greene	33	23	19	-30%	-17%	-42%	25
Huntingdon	5			-100%	--	-100%	5
Indiana	8		2	-100%	--	-75%	5
Jefferson	11	7	2	-36%	-71%	-82%	7
Juniata	3			-100%	--	-100%	3
Lackawanna	1		1	-100%	--	0%	1
Lancaster	121	106	23	-12%	-78%	-81%	83
Lawrence	3	40	46	1233%	15%	1433%	30
Lebanon				--	--	--	--
Lehigh	421	423	193	0%	-54%	-54%	346
Luzerne	147	139	19	-5%	-86%	-87%	102
Lycoming	43	35	25	-19%	-29%	-42%	34
McKean	9	3	1	-67%	-67%	-89%	4
Mercer	58	53	13	-9%	-75%	-78%	41
Mifflin		2		--	-100%	--	2
Monroe	50	38	8	-24%	-79%	-84%	32
Montgomery	170	207	132	22%	-36%	-22%	170
Montour	5	1	1	-80%	0%	-80%	2
Northampton	116	88	31	-24%	-65%	-73%	78
Northumberland	130	145	59	12%	-59%	-55%	111
Perry	22	36	2	64%	-94%	-91%	20
Pike				--	--	--	--
Potter				--	--	--	--
Schuylkill	183	161	68	-12%	-58%	-63%	137
Snyder	4	10	11	150%	10%	175%	8
Somerset	46	63	2	37%	-97%	-96%	37
Susquehanna	1			-100%	--	-100%	1
Tioga	2	2		0%	-100%	-100%	2
Union	7	3		-57%	-100%	-100%	5
Venango	4	12	8	200%	-33%	100%	8
Warren		2		--	-100%	--	2
Washington	235	231	135	-2%	-42%	-43%	200
Wayne				--	--	--	--
Westmoreland	42	23	12	-45%	-48%	-71%	26
Wyoming			4	--	--	--	4
York	369	385	220	4%	-43%	-40%	325
Total	4,542	4,705	2,707				
Average	81	94	55				
Median	28	33	14				
3 Year Average							77
3 Year Median							22

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Truancy - Data: 2007-2009

Attachment 3

AOPC

County	Paid to School District			% Change In Payments: 2007-09	3 Year Average
	2007	2008	2009		
Adams	(43,036.95)	(39,229.12)	(14,223.23)	-67%	(32,163.10)
Allegheny	(119,782.53)	(101,666.86)	(55,079.87)	-54%	(92,176.42)
Armstrong	(6,205.30)	(5,925.72)	(2,432.30)	-61%	(4,854.44)
Beaver	(13,398.02)	(16,317.34)	(6,539.68)	-51%	(12,085.01)
Bedford	(1,959.43)	(12,363.84)	(3,485.15)	78%	(5,936.14)
Berks	(148,281.36)	(124,539.63)	(41,897.13)	-72%	(104,906.04)
Blair	(5,539.23)	(5,195.95)	(2,590.74)	-53%	(4,441.97)
Bradford	(8,639.09)	(11,028.55)	(1,191.53)	-86%	(6,953.06)
Bucks	(29,302.58)	(26,399.41)	(17,369.01)	-41%	(24,357.00)
Butler	(13,799.00)	(16,470.36)	(17,211.10)	25%	(15,826.82)
Cambria	(4,776.27)	(12,779.74)	(3,874.52)	-19%	(7,143.51)
Cameron	(1,100.00)	(666.18)	(1,184.82)	8%	(983.67)
Carbon	(9,612.59)	(11,022.44)	(2,902.32)	-70%	(7,845.78)
Centre	(38,672.87)	(28,372.60)	(12,438.25)	-68%	(26,494.57)
Chester	(25,075.17)	(17,842.46)	(7,507.53)	-70%	(16,808.39)
Clarion	(7,048.42)	(6,042.32)	(2,489.76)	-65%	(5,193.50)
Clearfield	(1,835.11)	(2,588.87)	(890.00)	-52%	(1,771.33)
Clinton	(5,376.50)	(5,966.61)	(462.45)	-91%	(3,935.19)
Columbia	(11,557.44)	(7,706.17)	(6,084.18)	-47%	(8,449.26)
Crawford	(11,465.70)	(9,122.62)	(2,965.70)	-74%	(7,851.34)
Cumberland	(42,447.30)	(39,368.66)	(20,744.49)	-51%	(34,186.82)
Dauphin	(22,358.59)	(30,082.33)	(8,451.42)	-62%	(20,297.45)
Delaware	(43,640.37)	(28,083.43)	(10,758.27)	-75%	(27,494.02)
Elk	(1,817.41)	(2,875.57)	(2,426.76)	34%	(2,373.25)
Erie	(38,483.71)	(51,352.86)	(20,180.46)	-48%	(36,672.34)
Fayette	(41,197.69)	(32,001.05)	(14,241.85)	-65%	(29,146.86)
Forest				--	--
Franklin	(14,523.92)	(15,333.95)	(7,809.90)	-46%	(12,555.92)
Fulton	(2,949.36)	(4,606.71)	(2,733.05)	-7%	(3,429.71)
Greene	(5,151.64)	(8,273.00)	(2,047.94)	-60%	(5,157.53)
Huntingdon	(2,005.00)	(1,236.00)	(966.02)	-52%	(1,402.34)
Indiana	(7,963.18)	(6,360.93)	(4,571.22)	-43%	(6,298.44)
Jefferson	(3,610.99)	(2,256.60)	(1,648.22)	-54%	(2,505.27)
Juniata	(3,876.76)	(3,333.47)	(1,962.76)	-49%	(3,057.66)
Lackawanna	(3,165.19)	(2,729.13)	(1,415.06)	-55%	(2,436.46)
Lancaster	(85,396.35)	(73,158.97)	(46,494.44)	-46%	(68,349.92)
Lawrence	(6,647.51)	(10,697.55)	(1,989.63)	-70%	(6,444.90)
Lebanon	(135,895.42)	(134,243.00)	(71,006.56)	-48%	(113,714.99)
Lehigh	(109,550.52)	(89,015.86)	(29,411.48)	-73%	(75,992.62)
Luzerne	(34,209.12)	(27,079.05)	(9,787.23)	-71%	(23,691.80)
Lycoming	(11,059.74)	(9,637.42)	(5,199.34)	-53%	(8,632.17)
McKean	(2,560.70)	(2,224.59)	(1,254.31)	-51%	(2,013.20)
Mercer	(10,537.56)	(22,828.18)	(8,666.02)	-18%	(14,010.59)
Mifflin	(19,939.60)	(13,336.17)	(9,182.95)	-54%	(14,152.91)
Monroe	(20,305.70)	(20,852.94)	(7,668.74)	-62%	(16,275.79)
Montgomery	(18,699.21)	(22,169.21)	(14,601.96)	-22%	(18,490.13)
Montour	(2,100.00)	(1,064.15)	(9.66)	-100%	(1,057.94)
Northampton	(39,965.86)	(38,304.72)	(9,171.27)	-77%	(29,147.28)
Northumberland	(12,090.31)	(5,024.74)	(3,819.69)	-68%	(6,978.25)
Perry	(15,112.32)	(11,129.39)	(8,201.50)	-46%	(11,481.07)
Pike	(7,877.69)	(6,095.99)	(3,638.68)	-54%	(5,870.79)
Potter	(221.00)	(915.54)	(101.40)	-54%	(412.65)
Schuylkill	(40,569.21)	(31,313.62)	(13,738.17)	-66%	(28,540.33)
Snyder	(4,571.74)	(2,303.34)	(1,349.65)	-70%	(2,741.58)
Somerset	(2,950.10)	(1,941.72)	(1,314.99)	-55%	(2,068.94)
Susquehanna	(1,129.81)	(1,006.74)	(415.00)	-63%	(850.52)
Tioga	(729.51)	(1,279.37)	(353.05)	-52%	(787.31)
Union	(1,541.67)	(824.40)	(146.11)	-91%	(837.39)
Venango	(3,676.62)	(2,876.50)	(1,661.11)	-55%	(2,738.08)
Warren	(8,571.29)	(11,802.21)	(3,077.65)	-64%	(7,817.05)
Washington	(15,221.88)	(20,716.89)	(16,081.82)	6%	(17,340.20)
Wayne	(1,548.62)	(3,250.50)	(83.15)	-95%	(1,627.42)
Westmoreland	(16,062.04)	(24,724.75)	(9,371.15)	-42%	(16,719.31)
Wyoming	(6,326.00)	(4,560.00)	(5,917.20)	-6%	(5,601.07)
York	(214,476.76)	(171,368.93)	(122,661.98)	-43%	(169,502.56)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(1,589,199)</b>	<b>(1,454,887)</b>	<b>(709,153)</b>		
<b>Average</b>	<b>(24,831)</b>	<b>(22,733)</b>	<b>(11,081)</b>		
<b>Median</b>	<b>(10,075)</b>	<b>(11,025)</b>	<b>(4,223)</b>		
<b>3 Year Average</b>			<b>(19,548.11)</b>		
<b>3 Year Median</b>			<b>(8,082.34)</b>		







**NCSE** | National Center for School Engagement

**TRUANCY PREVENTION IN ACTION:  
BEST PRACTICES AND MODEL TRUANCY PROGRAMS  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**National Center for School Engagement**

**July 2005**

**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
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## **Truancy Prevention in Action: Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs**

### **Executive Summary**

Truancy has long been identified as an educational, social and juvenile justice issue worthy of public and private attention. It has been linked to many problem behaviors in adolescence, school failure, school dropout and juvenile delinquency, among others. Many national and local agencies are working to identify the best strategy for addressing truancy. In order to improve the chances of success, it is recommended that developers focus on those programs, approaches and strategies that have already demonstrated success.

Utilizing best practices is a sound investment strategy:

- *By studying those programs that have been proven to reduce or prevent truancy, practitioners and policy-makers avoid re-creating the wheel and have more time to spend on implementation and evaluation issues.*
- *By taking advantage of the research and development efforts of others, staff has more time to spend on adapting a strategy to meet the demands of the local community.*
- *By financially supporting practices that have demonstrated success, public and private funders engage in prudent expenditure of limited monies.*

Adopting and adapting approaches that have demonstrated their success is simply the most practical strategy for developing programming given the current and reasonable focus of policy-makers and funders on clear outcomes and cost/benefit analyses.

### **Critical Components of Truancy Programs**

As a result of the research and assessment work conducted by the Department of Education (DOE), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N), the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and others, a set of critical components linked to positive outcomes for children and families has been identified:

### **Collaboration**

Truancy programs that include a broad-based collaborative as part of their approach are stronger and may last longer. Most funding and government agencies now expect that new programs engage in collaborative community-based planning. OJJDP identified collaboration as a required component for initial and ongoing funding in the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program and for Title V Delinquency Prevention monies. The NDPC/N includes school-community collaboration as an effective strategy for dropout prevention. In addition, The National Network for Youth points to collaboration as an important part of successful after-school programs.

### **Family Involvement**

Involving parents/guardians and family members in truancy prevention and intervention is critical. There is a large body of research demonstrating the positive outcomes associated with increased parent/guardian involvement in school activities including improved academic achievement and reduced likelihood of dropout. Involving parents/guardians in truancy programming is more than simply inviting their attendance at a school or court meeting. True participation means that parents/guardians are sought after for their advice, experience and expertise in the community, as clients of our public systems of care and as experts in the lives of their children. This means engaging parents/guardians as a natural course of events, not just when things are not going well.

### **Comprehensive Approach**

Effective programs simultaneously focus on prevention and intervention. As described by the National Center for School Engagement, many factors contribute to truant behavior. Youth fail to attend school due to personal, academic, school climate, and family related issues. A truancy program may be called upon to help a family obtain counseling, advocate for a family to receive entitlement benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), negotiate a new school schedule, figure out transportation solutions, and other more traditional social work activities such as mental health evaluation and counseling services. An effective truancy plan will address these issues and be prepared to respond to the first unexcused absence of an elementary student and not give up on the 100<sup>th</sup> absence of the habitually truant adolescent youth.

### **Use Incentives and Sanctions**

Among the list of successful truancy practices identified by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), is the use of a continuum of approaches or a combination of incentives and sanctions. Specifically, meaningful sanctions for truant behavior and meaningful incentives for school attendance are key components of promising and model truancy programs. Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detention, suspension, petition to juvenile court, denial of privileges, etc. Incentives tend to be recognition-based, but may include special experiences or even monetary rewards. The critical task in this area is to design sanctions and incentives that are *meaningful* to youth and their families.

### **Develop a Supportive Context**

A supportive context is crucial to developing a sustainable and effective truancy program. Programs that exist in a supportive context are more likely to survive and thrive than those that are fighting against system infrastructure or acting in isolation. Time spent nurturing a supportive context is well worth the effort. In this case, context refers to the environment in which the truancy program engages youth and their families. The context can be determined by an umbrella agency, a neighborhood, a set of laws and policies and/or a political reality. It is in the truancy program's best interest to impact and influence this context to better serve families and to survive the inevitable changes and challenges that occur to even the best of programs.



**Evaluate the Program**

In these lean financial times, government agencies and private funders are limiting their investments to those programs or practices that have clearly demonstrated some success. It is imperative that programs measure their impact in an effort to improve services. In addition, the criteria used to identify whether program models and practice approaches are proven or promising rests largely on the rigor of their evaluation design. It is mandatory in this environment to collect and examine data on program outcomes.

**Best Practices Improve Truancy Programming**

Programs that include each of these components are stronger and more successful. How these components are incorporated into existing approaches or developed from scratch should be determined by the needs and strengths of the local community. Creativity and determination are required for successful and lasting implementation of any new program!

*For a more complete discussion of truancy program development, the economic and legal impact of truancy and the importance of collaboration in truancy programming, look for the truancy series to be released in Fall 2005 by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network [www.truancypreventionassociation.com](http://www.truancypreventionassociation.com) in collaboration with the National Center for School Engagement [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org)*

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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