Chapter One: Overview of Truancy

- **Truancy fact sheet**
- **Truancy Literature review**
- **The Legal And Economic Consequences Of Truancy: Executive summary**

What is Truancy?

❖ Any unexcused absence from school is considered a truancy, but states enact their own school attendance laws. State law determines 1) the age at which a child is required to begin attending school, 2) the age at which a child may legally drop out of school, and 3), the number of unexcused absences at which a student is considered legally truant.

❖ Truancy is a status offence – an act that is a crime due to the young age of the actor, but would not be illegal for someone older. The other most common status offences are running away from home, alcohol use, curfew violations, and ungovernability.

Truancy: The extent of the problem

❖ While there is not an abundance of national truancy data, some metropolitan areas report thousands of unexcused absences each day.

> DeKalb, Jay, "Student Truancy," ERIC Digest 125, April 1999.

❖ Data from Wisconsin show that during the 1998-99 school year, 15,600 students or 1.6% of enrolled students were truant per day. Truancy accounted for about 1/3 of total absences that year. Truancy rates in the 10 largest urban school districts were twice as high as the state average.

> Legislative Audit Committee of the State of Wisconsin, "A Best Practices Review: Truancy Reduction Efforts," August 2000.

❖ Students with behavioral problems are often assigned to a counselor, but school counselors have large caseloads. Public high schools employed one counselor for every 284 students in 2002. Large schools (1,200+ students) employed one counselor for every 335 students. Counselors in schools with over 50% minority enrollment were responsible for 22% more students than their colleagues in low minority enrollment schools – 313 compared to 256 students.

> National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Table 12: Number of guidance staff and counselors, and the number of students per guidance staff and per counselor assigned to public high school students, by selected school," http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/2003015/images/tab12.gif, October 1, 2004.

❖ Boys are only slightly more likely to be sent to court for truancy than girls. According to juvenile court statistics collected by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 54% of all petitioned truancy cases between 1990 and 1999 were for males, and 46% were for females.

> Puzzanchera, C., et. al., Juvenile Court Statistics 1999, National Center for Juvenile Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2003.

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Truancy is a risk factor for other problems

❖ Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.

> Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., Thornberry, T. P. & Cothern, L. (2000, November). Co-occurrence of delinquency and other problem behaviors. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

> Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., & Thornberry, T. P. (1994, March). *Urban delinquency and substance abuse: Initial findings*, OJJDP

> Morris, J. D., Ehren, B. J., & Lenz, B. K. (1991). Building a model to predict which fourth through eighth graders will drop out in high school. *Journal of Experimental Education, 59*(3), 286-292.

❖ Lack of commitment to school has been established by several studies as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.

> U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; and National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, 2001.

> Blum, R. W., T. Beuhring, and P. M. Rinehart, Protecting Teens: Beyond Race, Income and Family Structure, Center for Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 2000.

> Huizinga, D., R. Loeber, T. P. Thornberry, and L. Cothern, "Co-occurrence of Delinquency and Other Problem Behaviors," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, OJJDP, November 2000.

> Loeber, R., and D. P. Farrington, "Young Children Who Commit Crime: Epidemiology, Developmental Origins, Risk Factors, Early Interventions, and Policy Implications," Development and Psychopathology, v. 12, 2000, p. 737-762.

> Loeber, R. and D. P. Farrington, Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.

> Welsh, Wayne N., Patricia H. Jenkins, and Philip Harris, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, v. 36, n. 1, February 1999, p. 87-110.

> Kelly, B. T., et al., "Developmental Pathways in Boys' Disruptive and Delinquent Behavior," Juvenile Justice Bulletin, OJJDP, December 1997.

> Huizinga, D., R. Loeber, and T. P. Thornberry, Urban Delinquency and Substance Abuse: Initial Findings, OJJDP, March 1994.

❖ A number of studies have found that truants have low self-esteem and experience greater feelings of rejection or criticism from their parents than non-truants.

> Bell A., Lee A. Rosen, and Dionne Dynlacht, "Truancy Intervention," *The Journal of Research and Development in Education*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1994, p. 203-211.

> Corville-Smith, J., et. al., "Distinguishing Absentee Students from Regular Attenders: The Combined Influence of Personal, Family, and School Factors," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 27, No. 5, October 1998, p. 629.

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❖ In 1991 and again in 1993, three grand juries in Dade County, FL analyzed the data from more than 5,000 of the county's most serious juvenile offenders and found that excessive truancy was one of the three traits most of them had in common.

> "Dade County's Juvenile Offenders: A Study of the Need for Early Intervention," in The Circuit of the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida in and for the County of Dade. Spring Term A.D. 1993. Final Report of the Dade County Grand Jury.

❖ Of the 85 juveniles convicted of murder in New York State between 1978 and 1986, 57.6% had a history of truancy, 7.1% did not have a history of truancy, and 35% of the records did not include school attendance information.

> Grant, et. al., "Juveniles Who Murder," in <u>Child Trauma I: Issues and Research</u>, Ann W. Burgess, Ed., Garland Publishing, Inc.: New York and London, 1992, pp. 459-472.

❖ After the police opened a truancy center in North Miami Beach and began picking up school aged youth on the street during school hours, crime diminished substantially in the targeted neighborhoods. For example, vehicle burglaries decreased by 22%, and residential burglaries criminal mischief both decreased by 19%.

> Berger, W., and Susan Wind, "Police Eliminating Truancy: A PET Project," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Feb. 2000, p. 16-19.

❖ A combined analysis of survey data from 28 communities collected between 1980 and 2000, shows that truancy is a particularly good predictor of middle school drug use. Truant 8th graders were 4.5 times more likely than regular school attenders to smoke marijuana.

> Halfors, D., et. al., "Truancy, Grade Point Average, and Sexual Activity: A Meta-Analysis of Risk Indicators for Youth Substance Use, Journal of School Health, Col. 72, No. 5, May, 2002, p. 205-211.

Results of high school failure

❖ No one really knows what the drop out rate for truants is; most school districts do not collect the data.

❖ Data from the 2000 census show that 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 drop outs earned only 65% of the median earnings.

> http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1usboth.html/

❖ For every race and gender group, high school dropouts claim more in government-funded social services expenditures than high school graduates. For men in particular, dropouts incur more in criminal justice costs. The average dropout costs more than $200,000 in current dollars over the course of his or her lifetime.

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Vernez, Georges, Richard A. Krop, and C. Peter Rydell, <u>Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs</u>, RAND MR-1036-EDU, 1999.

❖ As of 1997, 41% of prison inmates, and 31% percent of probationers 18 years and older had not graduated from high school or earned a GED, compared with 18% of the general population.

Harlow, C. W., "Education and Correctional Populations," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, January 2003, NCJ 195670.

Court and community responses to truancy

❖ Seventeen states have laws requiring young people to stay in school or maintain a certain grade point average to earn or keep their drivers' licenses.

Kelderman, Eric, "Truant Teens Lose Licenses in Georgia and Other States," stateline.org, Thursday, August 19, 2004. http://www.stateline.org .

❖ Most truancy reduction efforts can be categorized as either school-based, court-based, or community-based. There are many examples of all three kinds of programs operating nationwide. Check the Truancy Registry, accessible from this website, for details of all the programs in this voluntary registry. One example of each type of program is listed here:

- Community-based program: Communities in Schools, Inc. operates in 235 school districts in 30 states. They work not only improve school attendance, but to break down all barriers to high school graduation.

- School-based program: Denver Public Schools has focused its truancy program on middle school students, trying to reverse patterns of truancy before they become ingrained in the high school years.

- Court-based program: The At-Risk Youth Program of the Seattle County Court, though a court-based program, involves the community in providing attendance workshops that are alternatives to standard truancy court hearings, and case managers to work with the family of each truant youth.

❖ According to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, there were 1,332 truants in juvenile detention in 1997, 913 in 1999, and 784 in 2001. The Census Bureau conducts this survey biannually for OJJDP, counting juveniles in detention nationwide on a single day in late October.

Sickmund, Melissa, "Juveniles in Corrections," <u>Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report Series Bulletin</u>, June 2004. And online data from the 2001 survey at http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State_Offense.asp, 9/23/04.

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Factors Contributing to Truancy

   Research, and our own experience, shows that the factors contributing to truancy stem from three realms: family and community, school, and personal psychological characteristics. They are listed below.

School Factors

❖ Lack of effective and consistently applied attendance policies.

❖ Poor record-keeping, making truancy difficult to spot.

❖ Push-out policies, for example, suspension as a punishment for truancy and automatic "Fs" for students with poor attendance.

❖ Parents/guardians not notified of absences.

❖ Teacher characteristics, such as lack of respect for students and neglect of diverse student needs.

❖ Unwelcoming atmosphere, for example, an unattractive facility or one with chronic maintenance problems.

❖ Unsafe environment, for example a school with ineffective discipline policies where bullying is tolerated.

❖ Inadequate identification of special education needs, leading some students to feel overwhelmed and frustrated with their inability to succeed.

Home and Community Factors

❖ Family health or financial concerns that pressure the student to care for family members or work during school hours.

❖ Child is a victim of abuse or neglect.

❖ Pressures arising from teen pregnancy or parenting.

❖ Safety issues such as violence near home or between home and school.

❖ Parental alcoholism or drug abuse.

❖ Negative role models, such as peers who are truant or delinquent.

❖ Parents/guardians who do not value education and are complicit in student's absences.

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Personal Factors

❖ Poor academic performance, sometimes due to special education needs, and a resulting lack of self-esteem.

❖ Unmet mental health needs.

❖ Alcohol and drug use and abuse.

❖ Lack of vision of education as a means to achieve goals.

Components of Effective Truancy Reduction Programs

❖ Parent/guardian involvement, or whole family involvement.

❖ A continuum of supports, including meaningful incentives for good attendance and consequences for poor attendance.

❖ Collaboration among community actors such as law enforcement, mental health workers, mentors, and social service providers, in addition to educators.

❖ Concrete and measurable goals for program performance and student performance. Good record keeping and on-going evaluation of progress toward those goals.

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Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review

National Center for School Engagement

January, 2007

Promoting attendance, attachment and achievement

Pieces of the Truancy Jigsaw: A Literature Review

Communities across the nation are taking a renewed interest in the problem of
poor school attendance. Truancy reduction programs designed to serve students who
have attendance problems are rapidly being organized according to a number of models.
Some are school-based, others court-based, and some operate through community service
agencies. All share the same general purposes: to improve school attendance in the short
term, with the longer term goals of raising grades and encouraging high school
graduation for students who are at risk of dropping out.

As the search intensifies for ways to nip truancy in the bud and reverse
established patterns of school skipping, more people are seeking sources of information
about the causes and outcomes of poor attendance, and about practices that effectively
reduce truancy. In general, the literature surrounding truancy is in its infancy.
Researchers are just beginning to add studies on school attendance to the vast quantity of
work on at-risk and delinquent youth. This document seeks to summarize what we know
to date, and point to areas in need of further study.

How Extensive is the Truancy Problem?

The scope of the truancy problem is difficult to measure, and data are extremely
limited. The first obstacle to data reporting and consistency occurs at the classroom
level. The accuracy of school attendance records depends upon the accuracy of
attendance taking. The second difficulty is at the level of school district practice and
policy. Many schools and school districts record absences as excused unless proven
otherwise. Attendance secretaries may be unable to distinguish between legitimate and
fraudulent excuses, and as a result, the number of reported unexcused absences is

difficult to establish with any certainty. The third and perhaps greatest obstacle is the

lack of consistent data reporting requirements at the state level. Since both compulsory

education rules and the definition of truancy are set according to state law, calculating the

number of truants across multiple states is like adding apples and oranges. Some states

require children to start school at age five, while others do not mandate attendance until

age eight. Students must attend school until they are 16 in most states, but a number have

increased the age to 17 or 18. Theoretically, data can be summarized across schools

within each state, yet, averaging truancy rates across rural and urban districts, or high and

low income districts, may obscure important patterns.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires, for the first time, that school

districts submit attendance data to their state government if they are to receive federal

money for education. Although the NCLB data reporting measure is a positive move, in

and of itself it is insufficient to produce a global picture of truancy. For one thing, there

is no requirement that states turn those data over to any federal agency. Secondly, states

are allowed to define their own formulas for calculating truancy rates, so the rates that

schools report will still not be comparable across states. At the time of this writing, not

all states have determined the required formulas. Of concern is the possibility that

requiring attendance data will create an incentive for some schools to push out students

who have attendance problems, rather than try to re-engage them and risk continued

absences. A student who has withdrawn cannot be absent.

Although we do not have data on the incidence of truancy, we do have data on the

number of truancy-related court filings. According to juvenile court statistics gathered by

the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the number of

petitioned truancy cases increased 92% from just over 20,000 in 1987 to almost 40,000 in

1996 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The same data show the rate of truancy petitions per

1,000 young people aged ten or older increased 97% among black students, 70% among white students, and 11% for students of other races. It is not clear to what extent these trends reflect an increase in the incidence of truancy versus an increase in the propensity of schools to send truants to court. However, a national review of discipline issues in schools conducted in 1996-1997 found that school principals perceived student absenteeism and tardiness to be the two most serious problems in their schools (Fiore et al., 1997).

One example of the prevalence of truancy in our major cities may be derived from a study using Denver Public Schools data from school years 2002/03 to 2004/05. Average unexcused absences per year ranged from just under six for elementary school students, to over eight for middle school students, and to around 17 for high school students. Almost 20% of all DPS students missed at least ten days without a valid excuse, causing them to meet the legal definition of 'truant' in Colorado[1]. Truancy peaked during 9th grade, then tapered off, presumably as the most truant students reached the mandatory attendance age of 16 and dropped out (MacGillivary & Mann-Erickson, 2006).

Though we still cannot see the extent of the truancy forest, we are beginning to understand the life cycle of the trees within that forest. This article summarizes the growing body of research on the causes of truancy, and then on its outcomes or correlates. Lastly, it will review the lessons we have learned based on research to date.

What Factors put Children at Risk for Truancy?

An overwhelming proportion of truant youth face major problems in their lives that challenge their ability to attend school. Contributors to truancy are often divided into

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[1] Section 22-33-107, Colorado Revised Statutes.

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school, family, and personal factors (Bell et al., 1994, Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Family factors include homelessness (Twaite & Lampert, 1997), poverty, single-parent families, large family size, and transportation difficulties (Jones et al., 2002). Other family factors such as elevated levels of family conflict, and ineffective parental disciplinary practices including inconsistency, both extremes of over-protectiveness and neglect, and rejection also play a role (Bell et al., 1994, Corville-Smith et al., 1998). McNeal (1999) finds that, although all forms of parental involvement result in lower rates of truancy, the beneficial effects of parental involvement are greater among families with higher levels of socio-economic status.

School factors include poor relations with teachers (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), inappropriate academic placement (Jones et al., 2002), and ineffective and inconsistently applied attendance policies (Bell et al., 1994). Pellerin (2000) explores the effect of advanced placement (AP) classes. She finds that high schools in which students are partitioned into AP and non-AP groups promote what she calls disengagement, which she measures by levels of class-cutting. Her results have not been replicated, however. An ethnographic study conducted in a large, multi-ethnic urban high school uses three theories of organizational culture, described as lenses of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Using these approaches, she dissects attendance policies and the confusion surrounding them. She paints a complex picture of how jointly held, but conflicting visions of school identity result in inconsistent application of attendance policies. The inconsistency is noticed by students, causing confusion on one hand and a perception of unfairness on the other (Enomoto, 1994).

Personal factors include poor self-esteem, feelings of academic incompetence, poor relationships with other students (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), and gang involvement (Fritsch et al., 1999). Truants generally report less attachment to school,

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and less satisfactory experiences at school, than non-truants. School commitment is sometimes viewed as an intervening variable (Jenkins, 1995) that can mediate the effects of some family variables, such as mother's education and parental involvement, but not others, such as large family size and living in a single parent family. The literature generally differentiates school refusal, which is based on a diagnosed school phobia, from other causes of truancy (King & Bernstein, 2001), offers an extensive literature review); however, from a school's point of view, the outcomes are one and the same.

Data on 634 students served by seven Truancy Reduction Demonstration Programs funded by the OJJDP reveal the depth of the challenges faced by truant youth. Eighty-seven percent qualified for free or reduced lunch, 19% had individual education plans, indicating a need for special education of some kind, 15% had school discipline problems at program intake, and 13% had juvenile justice involvement at program intake – a high proportion considering 70% of the students were not yet in high school. Thirty-six percent lived with only one adult in the home, and 20% lived with no working adult in the home (Finlay, 2006).

The most serious home problems often result in interventions by protective services. Records of over 17,000 New York City children in foster care reveal dismal school attendance rates – only 76.2% before being placed out of the home, and 77.7% afterward (Conger & Rebeck, 2001). A study of Colorado truants with persistent attendance problems included an analysis of juvenile justice records, which were available for 29 of the 30 study participants. The records showed that twelve of the 29 youth (41%) had been removed from their homes at some point by the child welfare agency. Out-of-home stays ranged from 19 days to over three years, with an average of almost one year each (Heilbrunn, 2004).

The juvenile magistrate who ruled on truancy cases in Denver took an unofficial tally of the major issues he found to exist among the truants whom he saw in court on one day early in 2003. Of the 40 truants, only three revealed no readily discernable underlying problem. A wide range of issues surfaced among the 37 remaining students including child neglect, abandonment, mental and physical health concerns including substance abuse among both parents and students, and 18 prior referrals to health and human services (Heilbrunn, 2004).

Mental and physical health problems, poverty, and family dysfunction can contribute to truancy, as can negative aspects of a student's school experience, such as bullying or feelings of academic failure. Personal academic motivation may help a child overcome some of these challenges, but given the seriousness of some of the issues faced by chronic truants, many need significant support to get them back on track.

Outcomes and Correlates of Truancy

Truancy has been clearly shown to be related to high school dropout, substance use and abuse, and delinquency. The relationships are circular, rather than linear. That is, truancy can be both a cause and a consequence of any of these troubling behaviors.

Connections to High School Dropout

The link between truancy and dropout has been demonstrated by a number of studies that show that dropouts may begin having attendance problems as early as 1st grade (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), or 4th to 8th grade (Morris et al., 1991). Students who skip significant numbers of classes often fail to earn credit for those classes, either because they also neglect homework and fail tests, or because of mandatory attendance requirements set by the schools. Students who have experienced school retentions and are overage for grade as a result, are at greater risk of high school dropout, even when the

retentions occur in the early grades (Abrams & Haney, 2004; Herzenhorn, 2004; Roderick, 1995). When they occur in high school, the chances of giving up on a degree are even greater. Baker et al. (2001) provide a more thorough review of a larger number of retention studies, a task beyond the scope of this article. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey show that attendance and other behavioral engagement measures have an effect not only on high school graduation, but, for those who do graduate, on college enrollment and graduation as well (Finn, 2006).

Several studies document the failure of truants to earn credits and progress on schedule. A study of the class of 2000 in Philadelphia shows that time enrolled in school does not necessarily equate to educational accomplishment. Researchers found that most Philadelphia dropouts spent several years registered in their high schools, but earned very few credits during those years (Neild & Farley, 2004). A recent analysis conducted in Denver Public Schools shows that high school graduates in the class of 2004 missed an average of 14 days over the school year, while those who dropped out in that year missed 53 days. Over 25% of the original freshman class had fallen behind by at least one year, and affected students reported that poor attendance had been a contributing factor. Graduates averaged a 2.86 GPA (B-), compared with 1.0 GPA (D) for dropouts (Hubbard, 2005).

Several studies analyze the motivational factors that keep young people in school or cause them to drop out. Hardre and Reeve (2003) find that a combination of three factors successfully predicted 27% of the variation in attitudes toward dropping out. One of those factors alone – school performance – predicts 17% of the variation in dropout intentions. School performance, as measured by standardized achievement tests, is heavily impacted by attendance (Caldas, 1993; Lamdin, 2001). Data from the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect show that students with 95% attendance

were more than twice as likely to pass standardized achievement tests as students who attended only 85% of the time (Kelly et al., 2005). Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison (2006) surveyed young people who left high school without graduating and find that, depending on the grade level in which they dropped out, between 33% and 45% say they missed class often during the year before they dropped out, and between 59% and 65% say they missed class frequently during the year in which they dropped out. Truancy, therefore, is a clear warning that a child may drop out.

The NCLB has had a profound influence on schools' incentive structure. NCLB requires that states set academic improvement goals based on standardized test scores and graduation rates, with the goal of 100% test proficiency and 100% high school graduation by the year 2014. However, test score accountability has been enforced much more strictly than graduation rate accountability. School administrators are keenly aware that a school is better off if low-performing students drop out (including most severely truant students) than if they take standardized tests and reduce the school's chances of earning Annual Yearly Progress (Losen, 2004). A review of the records of New York City Public Schools found that over 160,000 students were "discharged" between 1997 and 2001; the figure represents the number of students who were dropped from the rolls by the schools, not necessarily those who dropped out voluntarily. Although attendance records of the discharged students were not included in the report, students with poor grades, learning disabilities, and English language learner status were over-represented in the group. The author hypothesizes that many of these students were forcibly dropped as part of an effort by schools to avoid being identified as low-performing (Gotbaum, 2002). Long before the enactment of NCLB, research documented how strict and unevenly applied high school disciplinary procedures target disruptive and truant students and create an

environment that encourages dropout rather than high school completion (Bowditch, 1993).

Although the incidence of unexcused absence is are hard to pin down, we have a better idea of what high school dropout and graduation rates actually look like, and they are nowhere near what schools generally release to the media or post on their websites. When students stop attending, high schools generally assume they have transferred rather than dropped out. Dropout rates are counted only in terms of the number of students who take the time to fill out the drop forms. Graduation rates are based on the unverified assumption that many dropouts have moved elsewhere and their numbers are removed from the denominator as well as the numerator of the equation. Another common practice is to divide the number of graduates in June by the number of entering seniors in the previous September – so any student who dropped out before beginning his or her senior year is not counted. However, data show that most dropping out occurs long before students earn enough credits to be considered seniors. A number of recent studies seek to calculate more accurate graduation rates by focusing on larger geographic areas and taking city or statewide demographic changes into account. These studies, while differing slightly in their estimates, show general agreement in concluding that roughly 1/3 of our children are not graduating with a regular diploma four years after they enter high school (Barton, 2004; Barton, 2005; Greene, 2002; Greene & Winters, 2005).

Connections to High School Expulsion

A study of students expelled from Colorado schools found that nearly half of the youth had been chronically truant in the year prior to the expulsion, and 20% of the sample had been expelled for truancy (Seeley, K. & Shockley, H., 1995). (The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) advocates *never* suspending or expelling a child for truancy.) A 1998 survey of all Colorado school districts indicates that most teachers

and school administrators believe they can identify students who will eventually develop chronic truancy problems as early as second or third grade and further believe these same students are often those who later become disengaged with school and eventually drop out or are expelled.

Connections to Substance Use

Although most work focuses on the relationship between substance use and school problems generally,[2] a number of studies have looked specifically at truancy. Data from the Rochester Youth Study show a clear, linear relationship between truancy and the initiation of marijuana use. Among 14-year-olds, students who report skipping occasional classes are four times as likely to initiate marijuana use as students who reported never skipping class. Those who reported skipping between one and three days are seven times as likely, and those who reported missing four to nine days were 12 times as likely to initiate marijuana use. Chronic truants, defined as those who report missing ten or more days in a school year, are 16 times more likely to initiate use as non-skippers (Henry & Huizinga, 2005).

The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (Rainone et al.1993) conclud that serious truants are prone to substance abuse at much higher rates than non-truants, and that about 24% of serious truants need alcohol or drug treatment, while only 10% of moderate truants and 3% of non-truants need such treatment. Evidence from a Massachusetts study shows that truancy is also predictive of blunt[3] use (Soldz et al., 2003). And data from *Monitoring the Future*, collected in schools, show that even among high school seniors, those who admitt to truancy have higher rates of marijuana use than those who are not truant (Bachman et al., 1998). A

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[2] Perhaps the best, most recent work is drawn from the Adolescent Health Survey. Blum, Beuhring and Rinehart (2000) found that frequent problems with school work are predictive of both cigarette and alcohol use.

[3] Blunts are hollowed out cigars stuffed with marijuana.

study conducted among 10th and 12th graders at one urban Michigan high school shows that truancy is a consistent predictor of high levels of cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use, as well as binge drinking. However, it does not predict changes in substance use between 10th and 12th grade, leading the authors to conclude that young truants develop patterns of substance use early and tend not to change those patterns greatly (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002). A meta-analysis of data from 28 communities shows that truancy, along with low-GPA and recent sexual activity, is a strong predictor of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use for 7th to 12th graders, but that truancy is a particularly strong predictor for the middle school students (Hallfors et al., 2002).

Connections to Juvenile Delinquency

The correlation between school failure and delinquency is well established (Balfanz et al., 2003; Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990; Hawkins & Lishner, 1987; Smith, 2000; Wang et al., 2005). In Hirshi's (1969) landmark book, *Causes of Delinquency*, he proposed that a lack of school bonding releases students from their connection to conventional society and thereby leads to delinquent behavior. Since that time, many researchers continue to establish this link (Empey, 1982; Farrington, 1996; Thornberry, 1996).

Truancy as a specific type of school problem clearly relates to delinquency. Farrington (1996) finds that of the 400 youth in their Cambridge, England study, 48% of truants were convicted of delinquency, while only 14% of non-truants were convicted. Researchers conducting the OJJDP study entitled "Causes and Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency" identify three pathways to boys' problem behavior and delinquency. Truancy is an early, and key, step in what they call the "authority avoidance pathway"

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(Huizinga et al., 1994)[4]. Data from the Rochester Youth Study, one of the three studies contributing to the "Causes and Correlates" work, show a startling relationship between self reports of truancy and delinquency. Students who report skipping occasional classes are four times as likely as non-skippers to report having committed a serious assault, almost five times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and twice as likely to have been arrested. Chronic truants are 12 times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, 21 times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime, and almost seven times as likely to have been arrested as non-skippers (Henry & Huizinga, 2005).

Truant youth contribute significantly to the incidence of daytime crime. Data from the National Incidence Reporting System indicate that the number of crimes committed by school age youth in Denver during school hours exceed those committed after school (MacGillivary & Mann-Erickson, 2006). When truancy is addressed, crime and delinquency rates drop. A drop in the crime rate occurred when police conducted truancy sweeps in Miami (Berger & Wind, 2000) and St. Petersburg, Florida, (Gavin, 1997), and when Tulsa County Schools successfully reduced truancy through a new policy of filing court cases (Wilson, 1993). The Dallas Police Department successfully reduced gang-related crime by aggressively pursuing truant youth (Fritsch et al., 1999).

Connections to Other Risky Behaviors

Young people who skip school also engage in a number of risky behaviors. Adolescent Health Survey data show school problems, including truancy, to be related to weapon related violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and early sexual intercourse. The effects hold for the population in general, and for almost every combination of ethnic group and risk factor (Blum et al., 2000). Data from the "Monitoring the Future" study

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[4] Study participants present the specific correlations between school problems and delinquency in other publications. See Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998, and Huizinga et al, 2000.

show that truancy is predictive of drinking, driving after drinking, and riding in a car with someone who has been drinking (O'Malley & Johnston, 1999). In an anonymous survey of 25 Colorado truants, 12 report having carried a gun or other weapon at least once. Even if the weapons were intended for defensive purposes only, the figure is indicative of a high potential for violence in these young people's lives (Heilbrunn, 2004).

Connections to Adult Crime

Though data on the relationship between truancy and adult criminal behavior are limited, chronic truancy clearly leads to high school dropout and dropouts are greatly over-represented among prison and jail inmates. Bureau of Justice data from 1997 (Harlow, 2003) show that while 18.4% of the general population had neither a high school degree nor a GED, fully 41.3% of the incarcerated population did not have a degree. By 2002, the proportion of jail inmates without a high school degree rose to 44% (James, 2004).

Heckman and Masterov (2005) conclude that "one of the best-established empirical regularities in economics is that education reduces crime." A three-state recidivism study (Steurer & Smith, 2003) compared recidivism rates between jail inmates who completed educational programs while incarcerated and those who did not complete an educational program. The study shows that in all three states—Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio—rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration rates are all significantly lower for those completing a program. Alternatively, Lochner and Moretti (2004) estimate that increasing the high school graduation rate by one percent would yield $1.8 billion dollars in social benefits, largely a result of preventing an estimated 94,000 crimes each year. A moving and in-depth study of death row inmates reveals that truancy beginning in elementary school, and a continued pattern of failure throughout school, are typical of our most tragic criminals (Schroeder et al., 2004).

Official Responses to Truancy

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPA) instituted several regulations designed to reduce the number of juveniles, particularly status offenders, sentenced to detention, and to protect all detained juveniles from exposure to adult criminals. Following the passage of the Act, the number of truants sentenced to detention fell dramatically (Juvenile Offenders and Victims, 1999). However, the Act still allows for juveniles to be detained for failure to obey a court order. That means that a judge may write a truant a court order to attend school, and a child who does not obey that order may then be sentenced to juvenile detention without technically violating the JJDPA.

Despite the intent of the JJDPA, many judicial districts send young people to detention for failure to attend school. The practice is common enough to warrant serious reflection. Data from the *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook* show that 784 juveniles were being held in a residential facility for truancy on the last Wednesday in October 2001. (Notably, that figure was lower compared to previous years. In 1997, 1,307 juveniles were in custody for truancy on count day, and in 1999, 913 were in custody on count day.) Multiplying the 2001 count of 784 jailed truants by 365 days in a year yields an estimate of 286,160 total days spent annually in juvenile detention for reason of truancy (Sickmund et al., 2004).

Some status offenders spend considerable amounts of time in detention. Thirty-six percent (36%) of committed status offenders had been in placement for at least 180 days on the day of the 1997 survey, and about 15% had been in placement for 360 days. That is longer than youth sentenced for property offenses, although not as long as those placed for person offenses (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

Lessons Learned

Lessons from Schools that Sought to Recapture Lost Revenue

In some cases, schools and districts have been able to recover significant amounts of funding by actively pursuing truant students. In response to a $20 million deficit, Oakland Unified School District in 2003 decided to begin prosecuting parents. The effort was specifically designed to regain up to $19 million in per pupil funding (White & Fiss, 2003). In Tulsa, Oklahoma, county officials created a system in which parents are held legally responsible for truancy on one hand, but are provided with parenting support on the other. They credit the program with increasing school enrollment by 800 students a year and regaining $300,000 in per capita funding (Gerrard et al., 2003). The Fort Worth Independent School District in Texas added $4 million in state money to their 2004-2005 budget after raising their average daily attendance by 1% the year before (Murphy, 2005).

Lessons from Truancy Reduction Program Evaluations

Several excellent sources of information about best practices are readily available. Reimer and Dimock (2005) assemble a detailed description of effective programs, policies, and practices to reduce truancy, available through the National Dropout Prevention Center. Additionally, two Web-based databases are good public sources of information on a wide range of TRPs. The NCSE maintains a growing online database of truancy reduction programs at www.schoolengagement.org. At this writing, over 130 program directors have entered information about their approaches to truancy reduction and their accomplishments. The National Dropout Prevention Center maintains a similar database that includes programs with a range of goals. Searching the database for "truancy" currently yields 60 programs.

Programs that show improvements in school attendance tend to involve intensive case management, be family focused, and incorporate both sanctions for continued truancy, and rewards for improved attendance. Project Respect in Pueblo, Colorado involves entire families in fun activities that require school attendance for participation (Baker et al., 2005). The Louisville, Kentucky truancy court meets in elementary and middle schools before the school day starts and involves "pep talks" and applause for the accomplishments of each student (Byer, 2000). Jacksonville, Florida provides a continuum of interventions, beginning with one-day Attendance Intervention Team Meetings, followed by intensive case management, and eventually results in a possibility of a one-day parental arrest for educational neglect (Finlay, 2006).

True cost/benefit studies of a broad range of truancy reduction programs have not been conducted. However, one study analyzed the costs of three Colorado truancy reduction programs (TRPs), and the three truancy courts which participants must attend if they fail these programs (Heilbrunn, 2003). The study asks how many students a program must help through graduation in order to recoup its cost. It concludes that the most expensive of the three TRPs must only result in high school graduation for one out of 115 participants in order to pay for itself. The less expensive programs need to graduate one of about 350 participants. The smallest of the three court programs must encourage one of 115 petitioned truants to graduate, while the Denver truancy court must motivate only one of 739 truants to graduate in order to be financially worthwhile. These dramatic figures suggest that any program that is demonstrably successful in returning truant students to the classroom is likely to be highly cost-effective as well.

Many, but not all, truancy reduction programs show improved attendance subsequent to intervention. A study of a police-run truancy sweep in which truants were taken to a truancy center and required to sit still and be quiet, with heads on desks, for up

to six hours before being released to parents or the school, showed little positive effects on subsequent school attendance or delinquency (Bazemore et al., 2004). The lesson from this study might be that one-time interventions that involve punishments, but no supports, are not sufficient to correct any of the underlying problems that initially prompt the truancy.

Lessons from Youth with AttendancePproblems – Students' Voices

Fires in the Bathroom (Cushman, 2003) reports students' experiences in high schools, and their advice for teachers. It is the product of extensive focus groups with students from a variety of backgrounds. A chapter is dedicated to what happens when things go wrong, the first section of which deals with truancy and dropping out. The students have a number of poignant comments about skipping school. One student sums up the affect of being overwhelmed by a huge, new school. "When I was first starting ninth grade I felt so alone. I used to cut every day, leave classes early, come in late, just to avoid being there…. Some people like just being a face in the crowd, but it made me feel like nothing." (p. 162) The students report that truancy becomes a pattern that is harder and harder to break the longer it goes on, even after cutting classes loses its appeal.

> When you skip school it's like an addiction, you skip it so much that you're like: What's the point of going, even if you want to be in the school. After a while it's not fun anymore, you're sitting there watching TV – all the stuff that was fun when you're first skipping gets a little boring. And you're like: I shoulda been in school, it would be more fun. There's this block that keeps you from going. A kid knows their life is going down the drain. But if you don't like your school, and then you skip so much that you're embarrassed to go back, then you just don't go. I used to cut and smoke, and drink, and read. I think I was depressed. (p. 166-167)

Attempts to return to class often result in sarcasm from teachers, which, not surprisingly, sends students fleeing once again. One student said that "after three straight days [of cutting] I went back and the teacher said in a sarcastic way, 'Why are you here? I'm glad

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you've graced us with your presence.' And that was it, I'm like: [forget] you. I just left and didn't go back" (p. 166).

Interviews conducted among 467 high school dropouts reveal that almost all of them wish they had not dropped out. Having "missed too many days to catch up" is the second most common reason cited for dropping out, and is cited by 43% of the interviewees. Seventy percent of the participants report that having increased supervision in school to ensure that students attend their classes would improve students' chances of staying in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Once schools have exhausted their interventions, court is generally the last resort. Although judges make use of a wide range of sentencing options (Heilbrunn, 2006), little solid research has been conducted on the comparative effects of various choices. Most hotly contested is the use of juvenile detention for truants. The small, Colorado study discussed earlier asked 30 students who had spent some time in detention, whether, in retrospect, they thought they had benefited from the experience. Their assessments were fairly evenly divided, however, those who said they benefited from detention had spent considerably fewer days there than those who said they did not benefit. This may indicate that if detention is going to have a positive effect, it will do so quickly, and repeated and long sentences may be futile, or even counterproductive (Heilbrunn, 2003).

Conclusion

In general, the causes and outcomes of truancy are much more thoroughly researched than the effectiveness of various interventions. It is clear that truancy is an outgrowth of other underlying problems. Factors that contribute to truancy include family issues arising out of substance use, mental health needs, or poverty that causes parents to work long hours or requires inadequate living conditions. School factors

including whether a child feels like someone at school cares, strict policies that may have the unintended consequence of pushing students out of the classroom, and inappropriate class placements may contribute to making a child feel like he or she does not fit in to the school community. Layered on top of family and school experiences, are personal factors such as academic ability, placing a value on education, and motivation. Some truants have physical and mental health needs that make school attendance difficult.

Although truancy often results from deep-seated problems in a child's life, it creates additional problems in its wake. Although some young people miss school to care for younger siblings or to work, truancy frequently leaves young people with plenty of time to get into trouble. The frequency of risky behavior, including alcohol, tobacco and drug use, early sexual intercourse, driving or riding with a driver under the influence, and criminal activity increase with the frequency of truancy. Truants tend to do poorly in school, and fail to earn high school credits and progress toward graduation. A large proportion become discouraged and drop out altogether. Failing to earn a high school diploma is devastating for the individuals, but the negative effects of inadequate education seep throughout society. Dropouts are rarely prepared to contribute to the workforce, use more social service dollars than graduates, and require greater criminal justice expenditures than graduates.

It is in every community's interest to correct truancy before it becomes such a serious problem that it threatens high school graduation. Schools, school districts, courts, and community coalitions across the country operate a wide variety of programs to improve the attendance and achievement of struggling students. Although rigorous evaluations are few, many such programs show great promise. Truancy can be corrected, particularly among the youngest students, and among students whose attendance is addressed promptly. Punishments alone are not adequate to bring students back to the

classroom because they do not correct the causal problems. Combinations of supports,

sanctions and rewards reduce truancy, and pay off for individual students and for society.

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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.

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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The Legal and Economic Implications for Truancy
Executive Summary

National Center for School Engagement

July 9, 2005

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The Legal and Economic Implications of Truancy
Executive Summary

The myriad legal and economic issues that surround truancy are intertwined and interdependent. This review paper summarizes these issues. The first section describes school attendance laws, how they are applied, and the most commonly used methods of curbing truancy. Sections two and three discuss legal issues and economic issues respectively. They address issues facing schools, truant youth, parents, community and business, and court and law enforcement. Section three includes a discussion of the costs of ignoring truancy and the benefits of addressing it. Section four discusses types of truancy prevention and reduction programs. It includes a list of best practices, and addresses the importance of monitoring and reporting program results. Section five concludes the paper with recommendations for state lawmakers, schools and school districts, courts, truancy reduction programs, and researchers. Finally, a list of additional resources is provided. Throughout the paper, many examples of successful truancy reduction programs, laws, alternative school and court structures are included.

This paper should be of use to several audiences: those who want to build political will to initiate a truancy reduction program; practitioners who work with struggling students; school, community, and court representatives will find the sections relating to their particular area of interest useful; and scholars will find a ready-made research agenda. For anyone concerned with the educational accomplishments of our up-and-coming workforce, this paper should provide a thorough introduction to the breadth and seriousness of the school attendance issue, and to the enormity of its consequences.

School attendance laws

Compulsory education laws are determined by state legislation. States typically require school attendance from the ages of six to 16, but variations in laws mean that depending on a child's state of residence, (s)he is required to attend as few as nine or as many as thirteen years of school. Only 16 states require attendance until the age typical of high school graduation. In most states, young people are entitled to receive public education until the age of 21, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that failing students who are expected to lower schools' standardized test scores are often encouraged to withdraw. State laws also vary regarding the definition of truancy. South Carolina attendance law is reproduced in an appendix. The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools and districts to report attendance rates for the first time, yet differences in state definitions mean that no aggregated national data on truancy will be available even under the new regulations.

Legal issues and perspectives

Schools face a number of laws and regulations on how attendance is recorded, how enrollment is calculated, grade retention policies, zero-tolerance policies, reintegration of incarcerated students, their responsibility to pursue truants, and by the No Child Left Behind Act. As a last resort, schools must file court cases but have no say in how they will be handled or how the court is organized. And , school officials must be aware that parents and students can, and sometimes do, file law suits.

Truants face direct legal consequences of poor attendance. Many schools automatically fail students who miss a designated number of class periods. If the school files a truancy petition, the student must appear in court and face court sanctions. Yet the indirect legal consequences of

truancy may be more severe. Truants are more likely than average to become involved with both juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.

Compulsory attendance laws often stipulate parental responsibilities with consequences that vary according to the age of the child, state of residence, and court philosophy. Sanctions most often include fines, orders to attend school with children, or attend parenting classes. In the extreme, parents may face dependency and neglect charges, lose custody of their children, or be sentenced to jail time.

Seventy-two cities have daytime curfew laws for school-aged youth, though rarely are businesses legally prevented from serving youth. Truants are often viewed as a nuisance when they congregate in public places.

Courts and law enforcement have a wide array of choices in dealing with truants. Law enforcement departments must decide whether to pick truants up and what to do with them. The court system must decide which court will hear truancy cases; whether to hold a separate truancy docket; how to achieve consistency in sentencing across judges; what sanctions to employ, and whether and what kind of alternative truancy reduction program to offer.

Economic issues and perspectives

Truancy reduction programs (TRPs) are highly cost-effective. The average high school dropout costs society over $200,000 (discounted to the current value of the money). Yet many TRPs operate on less than $100,000 a year. Thus, if they make the difference between graduation and dropout for even one child annually, they may be viewed as a sound investment of public funds.

Attendance has economic implications for schools. On one hand, most schools are funded based on attendance during "count day" or "count week." On the other hand, truant students are

expensive to educate; they use more counselor time, generate more disciplinary referrals, and require more tutoring. Schools have more incentive to promote good attendance when funding is based on average daily attendance throughout the year.

Economic hardship both contributes to and is exacerbated by truancy. Parents who work long hours cannot monitor school attendance. Those who have trouble paying bills tend to move frequently – a risk factor for school dropout. Truancy exacerbates these problems when parents must take time off from work to address their children's school attendance or pay court fines. Yet the greatest cost of truancy that leads to high school dropout is incurred in lost earning potential. High school graduates earned over $8,000 more than dropouts in 2000.

Business has a dual interest in school attendance. In the short run, truants may be customers of local stores, but may also be responsible for shoplifting. In the long run, American business benefits from a more educated workforce.

Although law enforcement and courts incur costs when they deal with truants, those costs will be offset by savings in handling delinquency and adult criminality in the future. The cost to law enforcement of handling truancy can be minimized by setting up truancy drop-off centers. The cost to courts can be minimized by using alternatives to juvenile detention.

Truancy Prevention and Reduction Programs

Truancy reduction programs (TRPs) take a wide variety of forms. They may operate in one school, or cover a school district or a state. Most are organized either by schools, a court, or a community coalition. School districts use case managers, school attendance review boards, alternative schools, and distance learning options in their battle against truancy. Courts that run TRPs tend to take a social service rather than a punitive approach. Some run court programs right at the school building. Community based programs, of which there are many models, have

the advantage of drawing on a wide range of talents and funding sources, and having a broad base of support.

Regardless of the type of program, monitoring progress and outcomes is essential to maintaining support and funding. Process evaluations, outcome evaluations, and cost-benefit analyses have different worthwhile purposes. Evaluations of many programs show short run success, but few studies have followed participants long enough to know whether programs are achieving their long-term goal of high school graduation.

Summary and Recommendations

Truancy is both a cause and an effect of legal and economic problems. Research shows that truants: often come from low-income families; have parents who lack high school degrees; are victims of abuse or neglect; have mental health problems; or have parents with histories of criminality or substance abuse. Some are highly intelligent and bored with school. Regardless of a child's circumstances, unstructured time provides opportunities for youngsters to get into serious trouble. Society has a responsibility to ensure they gain the tools necessary for successful adult life; otherwise, we perpetuate the cycle of low education and low opportunity. Problems not solved among this generation will likely surface again in the next.

TRPs promote educational success, reduce juvenile and adult criminality, save taxpayer money, and generate indirect benefits via social service referrals. Their benefits will likely continue to be felt by the children of today's participants. A broad range of agencies and groups must take responsibility for making structural, systemic changes in order to improve life's opportunities for our children. The paper concludes with specific recommendations for state laws, school and school district policies, courts, truancy reduction programs, and researchers. Examples include the following.

Recommendations for state laws

- ✓ Expand data reporting laws.
- ✓ Eliminate push-out laws, and get school incentives right.
- ✓ Encourage consistency in the educational experiences of children removed from their homes by the court.

Recommendations for schools and school districts

- ✓ Make accurate attendance reporting a priority.
- ✓ *Never* assign out-of-school suspension as a punishment for truancy.
- ✓ Eliminate automatic "Fs" for students who miss a certain number of class periods. Alternatively, allow students to earn back attendance credit for unexcused absences by attending Saturday school.

Recommendations for courts

- ✓ Create a truancy docket within the juvenile or family court so that all truancy cases are heard on the same day. This saves schools significant resources in terms of personnel time, making schools more willing to file cases.
- ✓ Every youth is entitled to an advocate who may be a lawyer, a guardian ad litem, or a social service worker.
- ✓ Truancy court judges should have flexibility in sentencing options, including alternatives to juvenile detention for even the most difficult cases.

Recommendations for truancy reduction programs

- ✓ Catch problems early, and act aggressively.
- ✓ Gain trust and support of parents and students by advocating for truant youth and their families.
- ✓ Use both carrots and sticks in dealing with truants and parents.

Recommendations for researchers

- ✓ Are there different typologies among truants? In other words are there subsets of truants with different characteristics, motivations and likely outcomes?
- ✓ What is the interaction between truancy and delinquency? What characteristics are predictive of the truant-only, delinquent-only, and truant-delinquent populations?
- ✓ Above all, how can we best motivate students with poor attendance problems to return to class, stay there, and graduate?

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.

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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