



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/tabc12.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.



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. & Cothorn, 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. Cothorn, "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.



- ❖ 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 Child Trauma I: Issues and Research, 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.



Vernez, Georges, Richard A. Krop, and C. Peter Rydell, Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs, 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," Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report Series Bulletin, June 2004. And online data from the 2001 survey at http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State_Offense.asp, 9/23/04.



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.



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.