
Truant Students

Evaluating the Impact of the “Becca Bill” Truancy Petition Requirements

Technical Appendices

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Appendix 1: Truancy Literature Review

Definition and Measures of Truancy

One of the most common definitions of truancy is "excessive unexcused absences."¹ In Washington State, the operational definition of truancy is five or more unexcused absences in a month or ten in a year. An unexcused absence is defined as the time a student misses the majority of hours or periods in a school day or fails to meet the school district's definition of an excused absence.² Within this operational definition, local school districts and individual schools have substantial discretion to determine what is considered an excused absence. School districts may measure truancy rates in a number of different ways, including changes in the percent of average daily attendance, number of unexcused absences, and number of petitions filed. Less direct measures include graduation and dropout rates.

It is difficult to formulate meaningful comparisons on truancy from the studies conducted due to methodological problems³ such as:

- lack of a clear definition of truancy;
- lack of control groups;
- small numbers of students examined;
- students from backgrounds that may not be relevant to U. S. students today (e.g., British children in the 1960s or American black males in the 1930s);
- inconsistent assessment procedures; or
- lack of follow-up on the performance of truant students after interventions.

Petitions filed on truant students in Washington State were about one percent of the school-aged population. However, this percentage does not include truant students who never reach the petition stage, the large number of "excused" absences, or students under age 8 or 18 years and older.⁴ Studies consistently demonstrate a high correlation between truancy and becoming a dropout.⁵ Over the last 15 years, there has been a declining rate of status dropouts⁶ nationally from 14.6 percent in 1979 to 11.5 percent in 1994.⁷ Unfortunately, no reliable information is available to measure the extent of truancy nationwide in our public schools, although the average percent of K–12 students absent (both excused and unexcused) was seven percent in the 1993-94 school year. Washington State's average percent of K–12 students who were absent was also seven percent in the 1993-94 school year.⁸

¹ Robert Schultz, "Truancy: Issues and Interventions," *Behavioral Disorders* 12 (February 1987): 118.

² RCW 28A.225.020(2).

³ Schultz, 127-128.

⁴ RCW 28A.225.010(1) states that petitions may only be filed on students from ages 8 to 18.

⁵ School Information and Research Service (SIRS), "Increasing Student Attendance," *Management Information* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 16; and Schultz, 118.

⁶ A status dropout rate is defined as a cumulative rate and includes all dropouts regardless of when they last were in school.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Dropout Rates in the U.S.: 1994," viii.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education 1996," 138. Calculation derived from OSPI data on October 1993 head count and U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, "Digest of Education Statistics 1996," 56, 59.

Who Are the Truant Students and Why Are They Absent?

Three categories for reviewing characteristics related to truancy are provided in current literature: personal, family, and school. The findings discussed in this section are subject to two caveats: (1) the longitudinal studies on truancy have small sample sizes, contain data on students from 25 years (or more) ago, and focus on populations that may not be appropriate in today's world, and (2) recent studies contain small samples with very little follow-up. Nonetheless, these are the studies referenced throughout most of the literature and thus are presented here, with noted caution, until more useful information is available.

Personal traits. In studies that have reviewed truant students' personal characteristics, it has been found that these students are more likely to have one or more of the following problems: academic failure, poor social and emotional functioning, ethnic or race dissonance, health problems, and an inability to feel a part of their school culture.⁹ Male truants are more likely to engage in delinquent activities.¹⁰ Elementary truancy was correlated with high school truancies.¹¹ Many of the truancy studies have limited themselves to boys, ignoring that girls are just as likely to be truant, a bias that also appears in the literature review of dropouts. In addition, some of the personal traits associated with truants are also identified for dropouts (e.g., academic failure and alienation from school).¹²

Family traits. Common family traits identified in a number of truant students include a history of abuse, parental alcoholism,¹³ the need to stay home to care for siblings,¹⁴ and low parental value placed on obtaining an education.¹⁵

School system. Academic climate has a significant impact on students' attitudes and attendance in school. A school's policies, rules, curriculum, and teacher characteristics can contribute to truancy. A child not actively engaged in school will not sense that he or she is missed when absent.¹⁶

In a study of student attendance at 59 metropolitan high schools in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, it was found that the two strongest variables impacting attendance were: (1) percent of minority students in school—as the percent of minority students increases, attendance decreases in all high school grades, and (2) percent of students who go on to attend a four-year college—as the percent of students planning to attend four-year colleges increased, attendance increased. Variables that did not seem to affect attendance included: percent of free and reduced lunch in the school, size of the school, first year change in attendance policies, failing

⁹ David Brown, "Truants, Families and Schools: a critique of the literature on truancy," *Educational Review* 35, no. 3 (1983): 233; and Allison J. Bell, Lee A. Rosen, and Dionne Dynlacht, "Truancy Intervention," *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 27 (1994): 204; and Amy Dieboldt and Lisa Herlache, "The School Psychologist as a Consultant in Truancy," (Washington, DC: ERIC Reports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, March 1991, ED3344867), 3-4. Vicki Petzko, "The Relationship of Characteristics of Large, Metropolitan High Schools to School Attendance Rates," p 17.

¹⁰ Kandel, 333; and Eileen Garry, "Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems," 1 [*Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention], (October 1996); and Bell, 205.

¹¹ Lionel Hersov and Ian Berg, eds., *Out of School: Modern Perspectives in Truancy and School Refusal*, (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 1980), 70-71.

¹² Delbert S. Elliott and Harwin L. Voss, *Delinquency and Drop Out*, (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974) 196-197.

¹³ Bell, 204.

¹⁴ Bell, 204.

¹⁵ Petzko, 17-18.

¹⁶ Dieboldt and Herlache, 9.

grades for excessive absences, reduction of grades for truancy, positive incentives for attending school, and calling parents the same day to report a truancy.¹⁷

Do the Interventions Work?

Before implementing truancy interventions, it is important for school districts to set clear attendance policies and promote communication with teachers, parents, and community members regarding consequences for unexcused absences.¹⁸ Current literature identifies three intervention levels for addressing truancy: the school, the student, or the family.

School level. School districts can implement a variety of changes to improve attendance-successful models that involve teachers in the attendance process: reward good attendance, install a system of recording and monitoring absences, provide immediate follow-up for absences, establish school counselor liaisons, involve parents and create meaningful incentives for parental responsibility, provide a way for students to make up work, ensure truants face firm sanctions, and form partnerships with local law enforcement.¹⁹

Several evaluations of programs from other states are available. An evaluation of the Learnfare Program in Wisconsin from the early 1990s, which reduced AFDC benefits if a student missed more than two days of school without an excuse, found Learnfare failed to improve student attendance. The study found the most important variable predicting attendance was the prior semester's attendance record.²⁰

In the early 1980s, Minneapolis schools simultaneously instituted an "excellence in education" program with accountability for learner outcomes and required more stringent attendance policies and truancy procedures. A study conducted in these schools found the changes resulted in more truancy referrals to the courts. In following the court interventions, the study found there was no significant difference in subsequent attendance between students with an immediate assignment to work squad (four hours of unpaid work) and those with the threat of work squad if they continued to be absent. From a sample of 150 students, 115 first-time and 35 prior truancies were tracked. The study found that over three-quarters of first-time truants were absent at least seven times during the 60-day follow-up period and 85 percent of youths with previous truancies were absent at least seven times. Approximately one-third of the youth continued to be truant the day after appearing in court. First-time truants who had no unexcused absences during the first week after court were less likely to be recidivists than those who displayed truant behavior during this time period.²¹

Instituting technological innovations such as computer assisted programs or automatic dialing of families when students were absent did not seem to produce significant changes in absenteeism rates.²²

¹⁷ Petzko, 137.

¹⁸ National School Safety Center, School Safety News Service, *School Safety Update*, (Malibu, California: Pepperdine University, November 1996), 2.

¹⁹ *School Safety Update*, 2; and Bell, 208-209.

²⁰ Lois M. Quinn and Robert S. Magill, "Politics Versus Research in Social Policy," *Social Service Review*, (December 1994), 512.

²¹ Nancy K. Banchy, "A Last Resort: Truancy Referrals to Juvenile Court," (Washington, DC: ERIC Reports, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1985, ED257027), 6.

²² Adrie J. Visscher and Klaas Tj. Bos, "Combating Truancy: Can the Computer Help Schools?" *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 19 (1993), 307.

Student level. The interventions available to individual student truants include counseling for alternative school (program or schedule adjustment, referral to different school) and family issues, in-school suspension or Saturday school, truancy court referral, student attendance review boards, the provision of extracurricular activities, academic penalties, and removal of driver's license. Unfortunately, reliable data does not exist on the effect of these interventions on student attendance.

Parent level. Parents can become involved in addressing truant issues through counseling with school staff; or courts may order parents to pay fines, undertake community service, or attend special classes. A number of these options are available under Washington's new law and will be part of the outcome analyses of the ten school districts selected for this study. They will also be discussed in the section on other states.

Outcomes for Truants

Despite the above studies' inability to find that particular interventions have comprehensive impacts on reducing truancy, there are studies that assess the relationships of truancy to other at-risk behaviors. Truancy in elementary schools is a strong predictor of truancy in high school, although many children improve their attendance. Students who continued to be truant had a combination of additional deviant behaviors including substance abuse, retention, arrests, and leaving the family home earlier than age 18.²³ In high school, truancy was associated with juvenile delinquency. Students who displayed excessive absences in high school (defined as 19.5 absences a year) were more likely to suffer from low earnings, unemployment, greater delinquency, and higher rates of divorce.²⁴

²³ Hersov, 70.

²⁴ Kandel, 340.

Appendix 2: Truancy Programs in Other States²⁵

Truancy Centers and Police “Street Sweeps”: Tracking Truant Students in the Community

I. Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program: Milwaukee, WI

The Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program (TABS) was established in November 1993 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The program began as a collaborative effort between the Milwaukee School District, the Milwaukee Police Department, and the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee. Sheriff Richard Artison spent two years prior to 1993 obtaining the needed community support for this center. The program allows police officers to pick up and temporarily detain truant youth. The youth are transported to one of two truancy centers located in local Boys and Girls Clubs. This coordination between the school, police, and community has earned TABS widespread recognition for their efforts in addressing truancy.

Program Description

The school district of Milwaukee estimates that on any given day, one to two percent of the school's total population of 100,000 students is truant. Recognizing the importance of keeping these students in school, the state of Wisconsin passed legislation that permits police officers to pick up truant juveniles on the street during school hours. In Milwaukee, four officers work in teams of two to locate truant youth in the community. The police take truant students to the TABS centers, located at two Boys and Girls Club locations. A TABS counselor and a liaison from the Milwaukee School District staff the truancy center. One sheriff's deputy provides security at each of the TABS centers.

Once at the center, the school liaison completes an initial intake of the student, reviewing current attendance records and contacting the student's parent or guardian. The student must complete an initial assessment that identifies reasons for the truancy and other problems that may be interfering with school attendance. Parents are notified to come to the center and pick up their child. Once at the center, the parent and student meet with a counselor to discuss issues in the child's life and identify goals to help decrease future absences. TABS also employs a school social worker to work with habitual truants and provide follow-up services or home visits to families.

If a parent cannot be located, the student may be released if over the age of 15. The TABS center notifies parents by mail if a student has been released. Students under the age of 15 are transported home by the deputy or to a local detention center where they are picked up by their parents.

Program Budget

The TABS program was implemented as a two-year pilot program in 1993. The state of Wisconsin funded the program in Milwaukee with an initial budget allocation of \$1 million. The

²⁵ A table outlining information on each program in this section can be found on page 20.

program costs \$588,000 a year, distributed to the Boys and Girls Club, Milwaukee Police Department, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department, and the Milwaukee School District.

In 1995, the state of Wisconsin mandated that the Milwaukee School District assume funding responsibility for TABS and contract with the Boys and Girls Club to operate the truancy centers. The district absorbed the total cost of operating the TABS program as part of its annual budget.

Program Results

According to the program director for TABS, the truancy centers received approximately 3,000 students during the 1995-96 school year. The large majority of students referred to TABS are from middle and high schools (85 percent in 1995-96). Of the remaining 15 percent, 11 percent came from alternative schools, and 4 percent from elementary schools. The TABS program reports that 15.5 percent of students conveyed to TABS had more than one referral to the center during the 1995-96 school year.

At the conclusion of each school year, Milwaukee Public School officials selected a sample of students who had been processed through the TABS center. The subsequent attendance for these students was followed for the 1st, 15th, and 30th days after leaving the TABS center. The results from the 1994-95 and 1995-96 school years are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Student Attendance After Leaving TABS Program

	Number of TABS Students in Sample		Attendance After TABS Contact					
	1994-95	1995-96	94-95	95-96	94-95	95-96	94-95	95-96
			1st Day		15th Day		30th Day	
High Schools	150	160	73%	65%	68%	54%	64%	46%
Middle Schools	108	100	69%	59%	65%	68%	62%	61%
Elementary Schools	42	50	78%	68%	86%	76%	83%	78%
Alternative Schools	52	34	63%	62%	60%	68%	58%	79%

As shown in Table 1, elementary school students were most likely to return to school following a referral to TABS. Students from high schools were least likely to return to school after leaving TABS; less than half the students from the high school sample were in school on the 30th day following their visit to TABS (1995-96 school year).

II. Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Project: San Jose, CA

In 1981, the city of San Jose experienced over 6,800 daytime residential burglaries that law enforcement officials determined were committed by school-age offenders. Prompted by community concern over the sizable burglary problem in the city, the San Jose Police Department implemented the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Project (TABS). TABS serves as a common intake and processing center for truant students picked up by police officers during the day. Once at the center, TABS staff contact the student's school and parents to determine the cause of the student's non-attendance and make appropriate referrals.

Program Description

TABS. The TABS program began as a joint effort between the police, schools, and the juvenile probation department in San Jose. The police department is responsible for the operation and finances of the two TABS centers in the city. The schools assist with staffing and routine duties. Both centers have identical procedures and operating guidelines. The Westside TABS center is located in a city-owned building, while the Eastside center is located in a classroom provided by the school district. Both centers are open from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Two full-time police officers are assigned to patrol the city and detain juveniles suspected of being truant. Regular patrol officers are also expected to pick up loitering juveniles. If a student is picked up and does not have a proper written pass for being out of school, the officer is authorized to transport the youth to the nearest TABS center.

TABS staff (school representatives, civilian volunteers, or college interns) interview students taken to the center. The student's school and parents are contacted to verify personal information and arrange a time for pick-up. The juvenile probation department is also contacted to determine if the student is currently on probation.

While TABS officers can transport the minor to a probation center or back to school, in most cases the student is released directly to the parent. The parent is then expected to return their child to school and meet with school administration officials.

TABS Enhancement. During the 1992-93 school year, the San Jose Police Department implemented the TABS Enhancement Program. This program targets elementary school students beginning to develop patterns of school non-attendance. Schools in participating districts provide the police department with the names and attendance records of students (grades one through six) who accumulate more than three unexcused absences during the school year. The TABS coordinator notifies the parents of these students and arranges a meeting at the police department to discuss the child's truancy. During this meeting, the coordinator works with the family to develop solutions for improving the student's school attendance. The coordinator will make referrals to other agencies if necessary and continue to monitor the student's attendance for the remainder of the school year.

Program Budget

Between 1981 and 1983, the TABS program was funded by a state grant from the California Juvenile Justice System. Since the 1983-84 school year, the city of San Jose has funded the program. The following costs are associated with the annual operation of the two TABS centers:

Two full-time police officers	\$150,000
Overtime pay for TABS officers (1993-94 budget)	\$175,000
Alum Rock Counseling Center contract	\$61,000
20% of sergeant's time for program supervision	\$18,000
Rotating school staff support	Unavailable

Program Results

The TABS program was implemented to reduce the number of daytime thefts that occurred during school hours. During the first year of operation (1981-82), TABS was implemented in only one-half of the city. In the neighborhoods with TABS, daytime crime was 35 percent lower than in the areas without the TABS program. The program was implemented full-scale during the 1982-83 school year. The San Jose Police Department estimates that during the 1980s, the residential burglary rate decreased by 70 percent. Although the effect of the TABS program on this decrease has not been established, the program has been judged as a worthwhile effort by the city of San Jose. During the 1993-94 school year, the TABS program processed over 5,300 students.

The most reliable outcomes on student attendance come from participants in the TABS Enhancement Program. During the first year of the program's operation, unexcused absences at the elementary level dropped dramatically; total unexcused absences decreased 72 percent, from 140 unexcused during the 1991-92 school year to 39 during the 1992-93 school year.

Prosecuting Truant Students and Their Parents: Responses From Juvenile Court to School Attendance Problems

I. Operation SAVE KIDS: Peoria, AZ

The City of Peoria, Arizona has implemented a program designed to intervene early in the careers of juvenile offenders. The Operation SAVE KIDS program started in May 1994 through the efforts of Peoria's Prosecuting Attorney. The main component of Operation SAVE KIDS is the court's Truancy Prevention and Enforcement Effort. Through this effort, local schools work with the court to track the attendance of the 12,640 students in the city. If a student has excessive unexcused absences, the student and parent can be charged with a Class 1 Misdemeanor. The student and parent may avoid these charges if they complete the diversion program offered by the court.

Program Description

If a student has three unexcused absences,²⁶ the school sends home a letter notifying the parents that they will face criminal charges if the student continues to be absent. The initial letter also asks the parents to notify the school of the steps they have taken, or will take, to ensure their child is attending school. If the student accumulates five unexcused absences in a semester (or ten in a school year), the school refers the case to the city prosecutor. The prosecutor reviews the case and sends a letter to the parents stating that the student must be in school on or before a stipulated date. The letter reminds the parents that failure to send their child to school can result in "a mandatory minimum fine of \$100 plus surcharges and a possible jail sentence of up to six months."

The school will notify the court again (by telephone) if the child is not in school by the stated deadline. After communication of the subsequent unexcused absence, the court files criminal charges against the parent and child for violating the mandatory attendance law. At this stage, the court will offer to enter into a "pre-complaint diversion" with the parent and the child. The pre-complaint diversion mandates counseling and school attendance. If the parent and child do not meet the conditions of the diversion, criminal charges are filed.

After charges have been filed, the city of Peoria offers a deferred prosecution arrangement rather than taking the case directly to court. Under this arrangement, the parent is ordered to complete a parenting skills class and the minor is assigned to group counseling sessions. The families pay for these classes on a sliding fee scale of up to \$30 for eight classes. If the sessions are completed successfully, the prosecutor drops the criminal complaint and dismisses all charges. If the terms of the deferred prosecution are not met, the matter proceeds to a pre-trial conference, and ultimately is adjudicated before a city magistrate.

Program Budget

Operation SAVE KIDS works closely with Arizona State University's Justice Studies Department. Arizona State University provides college interns who work with the prosecutor's office, the court, and the police department. This partnership with the University helps reduce the overall cost of the program. The additional cases from this program are managed by the

²⁶ Unexcused absence is defined as the parent's or legal guardian's failure, within 24-hours, to notify the school that the absence was authorized.

court as part of its normal workload. In 1994, the city received a federal grant of \$20,000 from the Office of Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The grant was matched by the city of Peoria and helps pay for an additional law enforcement officer assigned to juvenile crime issues. The law enforcement officer's salary is the only expense directly budgeted for this program.

Program Results

During the 1996-97 school year, Peoria's schools sent 1,013 advisory letters notifying parents of a student's third unexcused absence. The schools found 591, or *58 percent* of these students did not have further unexcused absences during the school year which required a court referral. Prosecutors sent notices to 422, or *42 percent* of these students who continued to be absent from school, and accumulated five unexcused absences.

A study is being conducted by Arizona State University and will examine the recidivism rates of juveniles charged with a status offense crime. The data collection for this study began in May 1994 and will report on recidivism rates²⁷ within a six-month period, a twelve-month period, and a three-year period. The study will compare three groups: (1) juveniles who fail to appear in court (control group); (2) juveniles who appear in court with their parents, and opt for, but fail to complete the diversion program; and (3) juveniles who complete the diversion program with their parents.

II. Truancy Intervention Program: Ramsey County, MN

The prosecuting attorney in Ramsey County, Minnesota has adopted a program that relies on a progressive set of sanctions for students and parents exhibiting problems with regular school attendance. The Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) was implemented in the 1995-96 school year. The program serves students aged 12 to 16 in the county's five school districts. A 1995 Minnesota State law requires the school district to attempt all available options, including the use of school attendance review boards or mediation programs, before filing a truancy petition in court. The Truancy Intervention Program in Ramsey County is designed to minimize the number of petitions filed by utilizing a progressive series of group meetings and mediation sessions.

Program Description

The Truancy Intervention Program assists students and parents in improving school attendance and avoiding court intervention. At the first stage of TIP, the school identifies students with three or more unexcused absences. The parent of the truant child receives a letter from the prosecutor's office. The letter instructs the parent that children with three or more unexcused absences will be referred to TIP. The letter also recommends parents make arrangements with the school to attend a day of classes with their child.

Once referred to TIP, the parent and child are required to attend a large group meeting held at the school auditorium. The meeting covers the legal and social ramifications of truancy. At the meeting, parents and students are reminded that poor school attendance, or dropping out of school, puts youth at greater risk of unemployment, welfare dependency, and criminal activity. School social workers are available after the presentation to work with families who need

²⁷ In the context of this study, "recidivism" refers to continued truancy by the student.

assistance. Students are notified that their attendance will be monitored for the next two to four months. If a student's attendance fails to improve, he or she will be required to enroll in the next stage of the Truancy Intervention Program.

If students continue a pattern of truancy after this initial meeting, they are required to meet with the School Attendance Review Team (SART). The SART meetings take place at the juvenile detention center. During this meeting, the student and parent meet with a review team that consists of an attorney, school social worker, probation officer, and other interested individuals. The purpose of the review is to negotiate a contract with the parent and student to improve attendance. If the family signs the contract, the review team will provide assistance with the necessary services to help improve the student's attendance. The review team requires the parent visits the child's school at regular intervals and have the school sign a form that describes the student's current attendance. The parent must return this form to the court or face court ordered sanctions. If the student refuses to sign the contract at the SART meeting, or violates the terms of the contract, a truancy petition is filed with the court.

Once a truancy petition is filed, the court sets an expedited hearing date. At the hearing, the court may order the student to probation supervision. If the family situation warrants, the court may also elect to place the student in a foster home or short-term residential facility. In 1995, the Minnesota State Legislature increased the penalties that courts may impose on parents who contribute to their child's truancy. The maximum possible fine was increased from \$50 to \$700, and the maximum jail sentence increased from 30 days to 90 days. At the end of 1996, the court had not imposed any truancy-related fines on parents.

Program Budget

The Truancy Intervention Program was originally funded for two years with a \$100,000 grant from the county; it was matched with a \$100,000 state grant. The program staffs one full-time lawyer and one administrative assistant. Based on the results after the program's first year, Ramsey County decided to include the program in its budget and fund it permanently. The program also pays for the cost of interpreters at meetings. Non-native English speakers can attend TIP meetings presented in Hmong or Spanish.

Program Results

During the 1996-97 school year, 2,023 students were referred to the Truancy Intervention Program. Approximately 1,621 students (*80 percent*) had improved school attendance following the first stage of TIP. A Student Attendance Review Team was convened in 402 instances (*20 percent of all referrals*). TIP officials report that 157 students (*8 percent*) had truancy petitions filed in juvenile court due to excessive unexcused absences. The Ramsey County Juvenile Court will continue to collect data on the outcome of students who participate in the Truancy Intervention Program.

Driver's License Revocation: Suspending Driver's Licenses of Truant Students

I. "No Attend, No Drive" Legislation, Iowa

A 1994 Iowa law allows the state to revoke drivers' licenses of students who do not comply with mandatory attendance laws. Under Iowa State statute, students ages 6 to 16 are required to attend school. Students who violate the compulsory attendance law and accumulate excessive unexcused absences²⁸ may be referred to the county prosecutor's office. The prosecutor submits the truancy case to mediation. If the student continues to be truant, and violates the terms of the mediation agreement, the matter may be referred to juvenile court.

While the court may sanction the parent of a truant child with a fine or community service, no uniform statutory penalty exists to penalize truant students. The court may suspend the driver's license of a student who does not attend school until the student is 18 years old. However, the "No Attend, No Drive" law includes several loopholes, including a provision that exempts students who work 20 or more hours a week. As a result, very few licenses have been revoked. A 1995 study by the Iowa Department of Education found that during the 1994-95 school year, only 136 truant students lost their drivers' licenses. During the same school year, Iowa State school districts reported almost 5,000 students of driving age were truant.

The Iowa Departments of Education study recommended several measures to tighten the enforcement of the state's truancy laws. The suggestions included requiring referrals to juvenile court when mediation agreements break down. Currently, the court exercises discretion on filing a case when mediation efforts fail. The study also suggested mandatory penalties for truant students such as fines, community services, and detention. Because the policy to suspend drivers' licenses of truant students was not widely enforced, the panel indicated a need to inform authorities about the law and close the loopholes which allow students to keep their licenses.

II. Driver's License Law and Student Attendance, Texas

During the 1980s, Texas enacted a series of educational reforms designed to assist students at risk of school failure or dropping out. This reform effort included a law which required school attendance for a student to receive a driver's license. The driver's license law, passed in 1989, states that in order to receive a driver's license, a student under the age of 18 must be enrolled in school and have a 90 percent attendance rate for the previous semester. Students enrolled in high school are required to be in school for at least 80 days of the fall or spring semester preceding their application; and those enrolled in a high school equivalency program must be in attendance for 45 days in the semester preceding their application.

In 1988, the Texas Department of Education began a five-year longitudinal study of newly enacted educational reforms aimed at preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school. The first component of the study involved a survey administered to all high school principals in Texas. Only 32 percent of the principals surveyed felt that the state's driver's license revocation law had increased the likelihood of students completing high school (67 percent felt the law had no impact for regular students). When asked about the law's effect on helping at-risk students

²⁸ "Excessive" is determined by the school district policy in which the student resides.

complete high school, 38 percent of principals surveyed believed the law would increase the chance of graduation, while 58 percent believed it would have no impact.

The researchers also sampled a group of 9th and 10th grade students considered at risk for dropping out of school (n=791). At the end of the sample period (1991-92), 79 percent of the students were aware of the driver's license law. Approximately 60 percent of the student sample felt that this law would help prevent students from dropping out.

The Texas Department of Education concluded that the findings from the study were insufficient to recommend either changing or repealing the driver's license revocation law.

Truant Officers: Tracking Students in the Community

I. "Stop, Cite, and Return" Program, Rohnert Park, CA

The "Stop, Cite, and Return" Program was initiated in Rohnert Park, California when local officials became concerned about the growing presence of students in the city during the school day. Working with the school district, Rohnert Park decided to appoint a police officer to pick up truant students and return them to school. The school district also appointed a Child, Welfare, and Attendance Counselor to assist the police department with contacting students and families to address the causes of the student's non-attendance.

Program Description

The first time students are picked up without a valid excuse for missing school, they are cited and released to school officials. However, the second time the truant student is picked up, the school holds a parent-student conference with the Child, Welfare, and Attendance Counselor and a representative from Youth and Family Services. The city also bills the parents \$50 for the officer's time.

If the student is found truant and cited a third time, the city's Youth and Family Services Department will issue a "Notice to Appear" citation for the student to appear in Juvenile Traffic Court. Once in court, the student and parent face a range of possible sanctions. The city bills the parent another \$50 to cover the officer's time. Parents who "knowingly permit" their child to be truant may be fined up to \$500 and sentenced to 60 days in jail, if ordered by the judge. Students face suspension of their drivers' licenses and mandatory community service time for a third violation.

Program Budget

The "Stop, Cite, and Return" Program is operated without additional expense to the school district or court. A police officer's regular duties include issuing first citations for truancy. If a police officer issues a second citation to a student for truancy, the city recovers some costs through parent fines. During the first year of program implementation, Rohnert Park Municipal Court agreed to take ten cases related to the third violation for truancy offenses. In the first six months of operation, no students received a citation to appear in court, so the court did not incur additional expenses.

Program Results

The Department of Youth and Family Services compiled statistics on the number of citations issued during the first six months of the "Stop, Cite, and Return" Program. As of March 1997, Rohnert Park police had issued 87 citations to students found truant in the community. Only six of these students (6.9 percent) received a second citation for repeating the violation of the city's truancy ordinance. During the first six months the ordinance was in effect, no student received a third violation requiring referral to juvenile court.

In addition to the "Stop, Cite, and Return" Program, the city has developed other community efforts aimed at reducing truancy. Through the Business Truancy Program, a representative of the Department of Public Safety initiates contact with local business owners. The representative informs area merchants about the incidence of truancy and daytime crimes in the

city. The merchants are asked to report suspected truants seen in the community during school hours. This link between the police and the community has added approximately 650 business people who have pledged to call the Department of Public Safety and report suspected truants in the community.

II. "Absenteeism Prevention Program Model," Beaver County, PA

Several school districts in Pennsylvania (and throughout the United States) have adopted a program implemented in Beaver County, Pennsylvania during the early 1980s. The Community College of Beaver County's Absenteeism Prevention Program Model seeks to influence student's attendance patterns through early identification and intervention. The program was initially funded by the Beaver County child welfare agency and administered in four local school districts. Since the program's inception, similar efforts have been implemented in several Pennsylvania school districts as well as school districts in Michigan and New Jersey.

Program Description

The Absenteeism Prevention Program targets elementary and middle school students with excessive unexcused absences. The program's Absenteeism Prevention Coordinator identifies students who accumulated 12 or more days of unexcused absences during the previous school year. At the beginning of the school year, the coordinator approaches the student's teacher and requests assistance monitoring the student's attendance. If the student is absent three or more times in a month, the coordinator meets with the teacher to discuss the absences. If the absences are unexcused, the coordinator works with the student and parents to develop a plan for improving school attendance. The plan includes home visits from the coordinator and appropriate referrals to community resources. The coordinator meets with the student, parent, and teacher on a weekly basis until the student's attendance improves.

Program Budget

Researchers evaluating the Absenteeism Prevention Program noted that running a similar program might be financially unfeasible for many districts. The program's primary cost is the salary for a full-time prevention coordinator. Although the state of Pennsylvania reimbursed school districts participating in the project for a portion of program costs, many small school districts were unable to allocate the necessary funds.

Program Results

Between 1981 and 1984, the University of Arizona Psychology Department conducted a study of the students in the Big Beaver Falls School District, one of the pilot sites for the Absenteeism Prevention Program. The study found a statistically significant improvement in attendance among program youth compared to a control group of students. After the first two years of intervention, 80 to 90 percent of the students involved in the program showed improved attendance.

The University of Arizona study also found a lack of structure in most of the participating families; drug abuse was the single greatest contributor to family dysfunction. The study concluded that the home-visit component of the program was the most effective way for the coordinator to establish an effective working relationship with the family. The home visits

allowed the program coordinator to build the trust necessary to make appropriate referrals and recommendations for the family.

In 1986, the Absenteeism Prevention Program became part of the Pennsylvania Comprehensive Drug and Alcohol Prevention/Intervention Program. This partnership provided financial support for other Pennsylvania school districts to implement the Absenteeism Prevention Program. Researchers at Villanova University studied the program in five school districts around the state with a sample size of 941 referred students. The study followed the students for nearly three years (December 1986 through June 1989).

The Villanova study found that the Absenteeism Prevention Program does identify students with truancy and absence problems. Students referred to the program were absent an average of almost three days per month. Once students and parents enter the program, they tend to cooperate with the requirements established by the school and program coordinator. Approximately 63 percent of students leaving the program resulted from the family moving out of the district. Only 3.7 percent of program exits were caused by lack of cooperation from students and/or family members.

To monitor program effectiveness, the study examined the change in absences in the five districts. In four of the five districts, overall absenteeism decreased; in the fifth district, absenteeism was unchanged. The decrease in absences was statistically significant in two of the four districts that showed a reduction in absences. The study concluded that collectively, students were absent and tardy less often following their participation in the Absenteeism Prevention Program.

Contacts

Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program (TABS): Milwaukee, WI
Dana Nix – Boys and Girls Club of Milwaukee, (414) 447-5333

Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program (TABS): San Jose, CA
Roy Bursch, East Side TABS Center, (408) 723-8227

Operation SAVE KIDS: Peoria, AZ
Terry Bays Smith, Governor's Division for Children, (602) 542-3191

Truancy Intervention Program (TIP), Ramsey County, MN
Kathryn Santelmann, Assistant Ramsey County Attorney, (612) 266-3125

Iowa Department of Education, (515) 281-5294

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"Stop, Cite, and Return" Program, Rohnert Park, CA
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Absenteeism Prevention Project, Beaver County, PA, (412) 775-7904 ext. 215

EXAMPLES OF TRUANCY PROGRAM AND POLICIES

Program / Location	Type	Grade Level	Date Started	Annual Cost (funding source)	Agencies Involved	Outcome Data (attendance)	Legal Sanction	Case Management
Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS): Milwaukee, WI	Truancy Center and "Street Sweep"	K-12	11/93	\$588,000 (Milwaukee School District)	Boys and Girls Club, Milwaukee Police Dept., Milwaukee School District	Follow attendance for 30 days after program participation; three years of data	None	On-site and follow-up
Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS): San Jose, CA	Truancy Center and "Street Sweep"	K-12	1981	\$400,000 two centers (city of San Jose)	San Jose Police Dept., local school districts	None	None	Coordinated between school district and police department
Operation SAVE KIDS: Peoria, AZ	Court Intervention	K-12	05/94	\$40,000 plus college intern support (city of Peoria and one-time federal grant)	Prosecutor's Office, local school districts	Six-month, one-year, and three-year follow-up on attendance rates	Mandatory classes, possible fine and jail time	Counseling sessions, parenting skills class
Truancy Intervention Program: Ramsey County, MN	Court Intervention	6-10	09/95	\$100,000 (Ramsey County)	Prosecutor's Office, five school districts, probation dept., program staff	Two years of data for program	Students and parents who violate contract may face fine or jail time	School Attendance Review Team makes appropriate referrals
"No Attend, No Drive:" Iowa	Driver's License Revocation		1994	N/A	Iowa state schools, courts	One year of program data	Courts may revoke drivers' licenses of students who violate terms of mediation agreement	None

EXAMPLES OF TRUANCY PROGRAM AND POLICIES

Program / Location	Type	Grade Level	Date Started	Annual Cost (funding source)	Agencies Involved	Outcome Data (attendance)	Legal Sanction	Case Management
Texas Driver's License Law	Driver's License Revocation		1989	N/A	Texas schools	After five-year period, Texas DOE study surveyed sample of principals and at-risk students	None, condition of licensure	None
"Stop, Cite, and Return" Program: Rohnert Park, CA	"Street Sweep"	K-12	07/96	No additional expenses	Local schools, Rohnert Park Municipal Court, Dept. of Youth and Family Services, Police Dept.	One year of data on students with repeat citations	Fines after second and third citation, possible jail time, community service after third citation	Arranged by Department of Youth and Family Services, after second citation
Absenteeism Prevention Program: Beaver County, PA	Case Management	K-8	1981	Varies	Local schools, program staff	Three-year follow-up period on student attendance	None	Absenteeism Prevention Coordinator conducts home and school visits with truant student and family

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