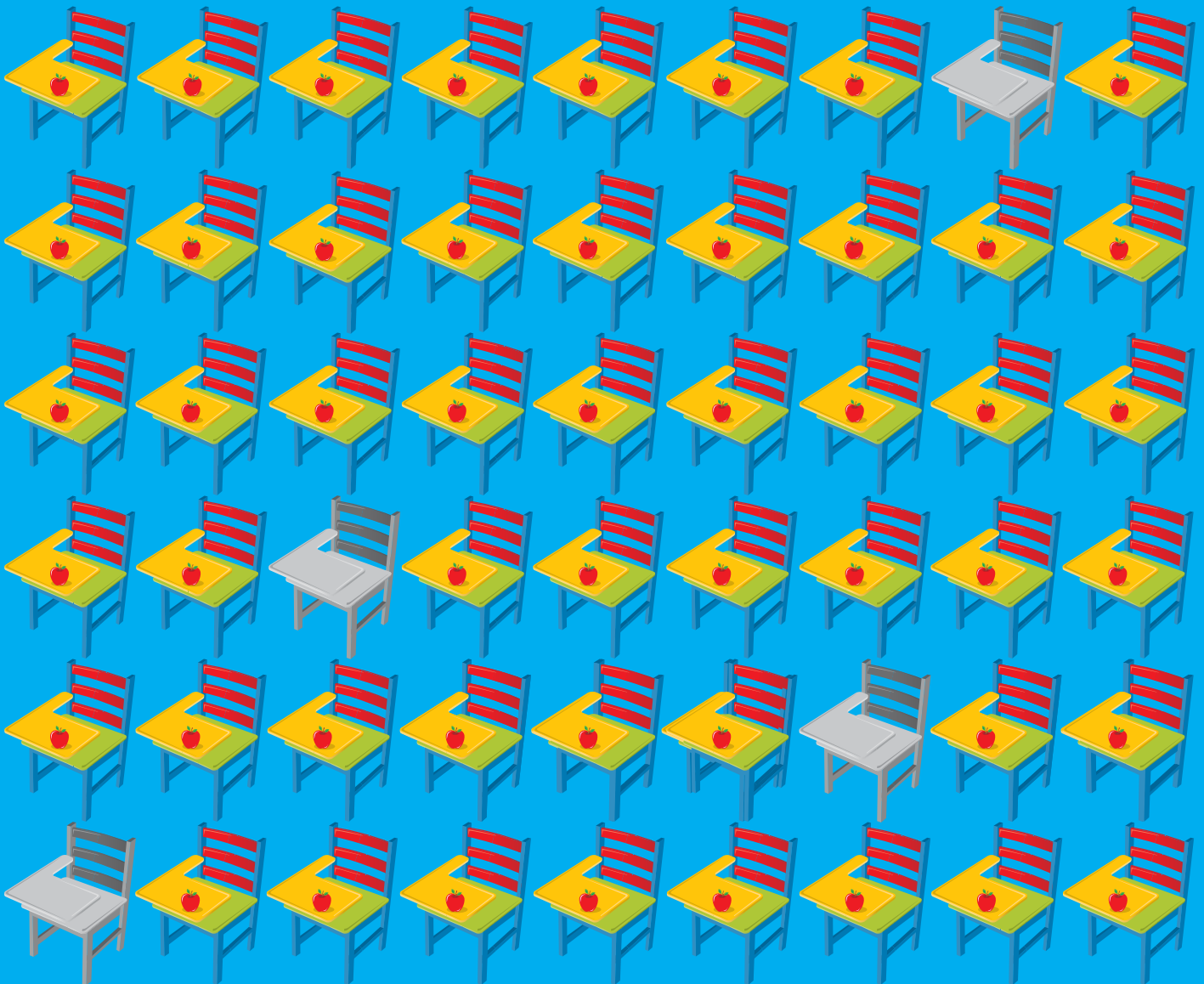


IMPROVING School Attendance

A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools



August 2005
Virginia Department of Education

IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

Virginia Department of Education

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Truancy: A Serious Problem for Students, Schools, and Society,
<http://www.k12coordinator.org/onlinece/onlineevents/truancy>

School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation,
<http://www.k12coordinator.org/onlinece/onlineevents/connect/>

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Table of Contents

Improving School Attendance: An Overview	1
Purpose.....	1
Overview of Content.....	1
Three Levels of Attendance Intervention	2
 Chapter One: The Importance of School Attendance	 3
What Is Truancy?	3
Dimensions of Absenteeism	3
Risk and Protective Factors	4
Truancy as a Predictor of Delinquency.....	5
Social and Financial Impact of Truancy and School Dropout	6
National Scope of Truancy Problem.....	7
Causes of Truancy	8
Consequences of Truancy.....	9
Risk Factors for Problem Behaviors Among Youth.....	10
 Chapter Two: Three Levels of Attendance Intervention.....	 11
I. Prevention.....	11
A. The Importance of School Connectedness.....	11
How Connection Helps.....	11
Markers for Students’ Connection to School.....	12
B. Connectedness Outcomes	13
C. Social Development Strategy.....	15
D. The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness	16
E. Strategies That Work	25
STRATEGY 1: <i>Create a climate that encourages students to become connected to their schools.</i>	25
STRATEGY 2: <i>Establish firm and consistent sanctions for truancy.</i>	26
STRATEGY 3: <i>Establish a community norm for school attendance.</i>	26
STRATEGY 4: <i>Have a system in place to notify parents when their child is truant.</i>	26
STRATEGY 5: <i>Establish discipline policies that bring students back into schools.</i>	27
STRATEGY 6: <i>Include parents in plans to address truancy.</i>	27
STRATEGY 7: <i>Establish programs at school that meet the unique needs of each student.</i>	27
STRATEGY 8: <i>Include students in plans to address truancy and ask for their input.</i>	28
Key Considerations for an Effective Attendance Program.....	29
10 Things A School Can Do to Improve Attendance	30
Effective Strategies for Parent and Community Involvement	31
F. Programs That Build School Connectedness	32
1. Seattle Social Development Project.....	32
2. The Caring School Community	34
3. Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programming (SEL)	35
4. Character Education	37
 II. Early Intervention.....	 37
A. Address Emerging Attendance Problems	37
Why Students Skip School	38
Attendance Review Boards.....	38
B. Provide Ongoing Monitoring and Follow-up.....	39
Helping Students Make the Transition to Middle School.....	39
Components of Promising Truancy Reduction Efforts.....	40
C. Connect Kids with Services.....	40

D. Provide Alternative Ways for Students to Re-Engage in School	42
Elements of Successful Alternative Schools	42
E. Overcoming Barriers to School Reentry for Juvenile Offenders	43
F. Truancy Assessment Centers	44
III. Legal Intervention: Tackling Some of the Hardest Cases	46
A. Judicially-Driven Truancy Intervention	46
The Truancy Court Diversion Program	46
Community Truancy Board	47
Steps for Establishing a Community Truancy Board	49
Truancy Mediation	50
B. Youth Courts and Truancy	50
C. Examples of Virginia School-Court Partnerships	53
Chapter Three: Community Approaches in Virginia	55
I. Virginia's Legal Framework	55
A. An Interagency Perspective on Truancy	55
Truancy-Related Terminology	55
Overview of Key Agency Functions	56
B. Legal Requirements for School Attendance	57
C. Schools: Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law	59
D. Courts: Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law	63
E. Other Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law	68
F. Department of Social Services Responsibilities	70
II. Meeting Virginia's Legal Requirements	73
A. School Procedures	73
Appointment of attendance officers	73
Non-enrollment	73
Non-attendance	74
B. Interagency Approaches	75
ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST	76
C. Seeking Authority of Court	76
D. Documenting Attendance Cases	79
Documentation Checklist for Juvenile Court Referral	79
III. Strategies for Effective School-Court Collaboration	81
A. Communication	81
B. Joint Planning	81
C. Training / Orientation	82
Glossary of Terms	83
REFERENCES	87
APPENDIX A. SAMPLE FORMS	91
SAMPLE 1: Report of Investigation: Non-Enrollment of Child	91
SAMPLE 2: Record of Parent/Guardian Notification of Pupil Absence	91
SAMPLE 3: Record of Direct Contact with Parent/Guardian Regarding Pupil Absences	92
SAMPLE 4: Record of Parent/Guardian Conference Regarding Pupil Absences	93
APPENDIX B. SAMPLE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	94
APPENDIX C. PREVENTION INFORMATION	106
APPENDIX D. KEY RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE	112
Organizations	112
Evidence-Based Prevention Programs	113
Publications	115

Improving School Attendance: An Overview

Purpose

Improving School Attendance: A Resource Guide for Virginia Schools is intended to serve as an informational resource for Virginia schools in their efforts to improve school attendance and to intervene with students who attend irregularly. Content in Chapters Two and Three is based largely on the following two U.S. Department of Education online courses offered in 2004 and 2005:

Truancy: A Serious Problem for Students, Schools, and Society, available online at <http://www.k12coordinator.org/onlinece/onlineevents/truancy>

School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation, available online at <http://www.k12coordinator.org/onlinece/onlineevents/connect/>

The book showcases strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective in truancy prevention and intervention with particular emphasis on school and community collaborative efforts. Also provided is a detailed examination of Virginia's legal framework governing compulsory school attendance and its enforcement.

Overview of Content

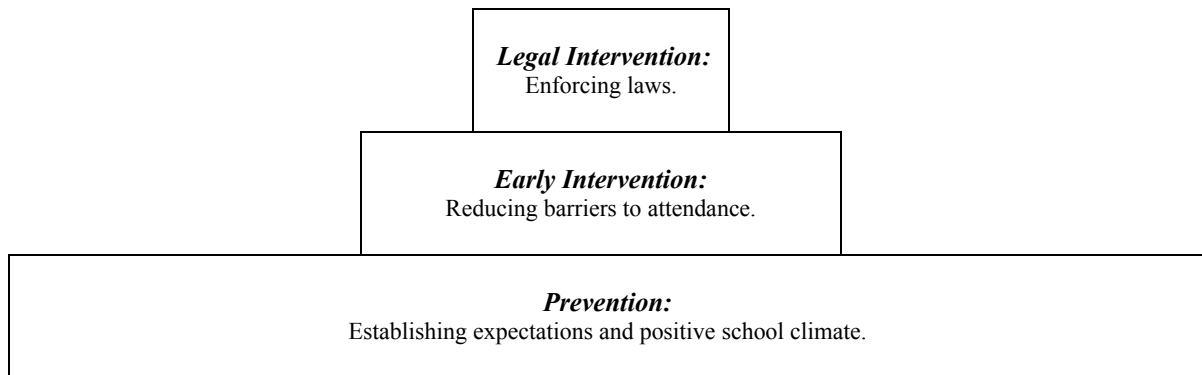
Chapter One focuses on the importance of school attendance and the significance of truancy as a predictor of delinquency, school dropout, and other problems. The many causes and consequences of truancy are examined.

Chapter Two sets forth three levels of attendance intervention: prevention, early intervention, and legal intervention. Research-based approaches to prevention are briefly described and specific actions a school can take to improve attendance are listed. The importance of school connectedness is emphasized and specific strategies for building school connectedness are explained. Programs and approaches that provide early intervention with emerging attendance problems, including attendance review boards, alternative programs, and truancy assessment centers, are described. Content on legal intervention focuses on examples of judicial leadership in establishing community-based approaches to addressing the most challenging cases. Information on community truancy boards, youth courts, and school-court partnerships is provided.

Chapter Three looks at community approaches in Virginia beginning with an overview of Virginia's legal framework that examines legal requirements for school attendance and the roles and responsibilities of schools, courts, and others set forth in the *Code of Virginia*. This chapter then turns to processes for meeting the requirements set forth in law including school procedures, interagency approaches, and specific strategies for school-court collaboration.

Appendices contain a variety of sample forms, policies and procedures. Also provided are examples of educational alternatives involving school-court collaboration and a community attendance improvement programs. The publication concludes with an extensive list of resources for improving school attendance including key organizations, evidence-based prevention programs, and publications.

Three Levels of Attendance Intervention



Chapter One

The Importance of School Attendance

Efforts to improve school attendance are an integral part of the larger school reform picture. Safe and healthy schools – ones that employ a challenging curriculum and reinforce high expectations for academics, behavior, and social responsibility – are schools that motivate students to attend. There is a vital link between effective educational strategies and student attendance rates. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires the development and implementation of a Uniform Information and Reporting System in every state. Truancy rates are a key performance indicator required to be reported at the state level and on a school-by-school basis.

What Is Truancy?

At its most basic, truancy means unexcused absence from school. However, there is an important distinction between *truants* and *chronic truants*. A student displays truant behavior with a single unexcused absence from school, but a student needs to reach or surpass a certain number of unexcused absences to be considered a chronic truant. It is this latter category that most people typically think of when considering the issue of truancy. Yet there is no standard level of absenteeism that constitutes truancy (or chronic truancy). Instead, the definition varies from state to state, and even from division to division and school to school. However, the federal government is currently taking strides to rectify this situation.

In Virginia, the law does not define a truant specifically but does define a child who is habitually and without justification absent from school as a "child in need of supervision" when certain other conditions are met. In the absence of a legal definition, the Virginia Department of Education is using a proxy measure to report truancy: the number of students with whom a conference was scheduled after the student had accumulated six absences during the school year, in accordance with §22.1-258, *Code of Virginia*.

Dimensions of Absenteeism

It is important to look at two dimensions of absenteeism: missing full days of school and missing some classes, but not others. Consider these two students' situations during their first year of high school:

Ella was bounced around from relative to relative after her mother lost custody, but none of them worked out. When her father gained custody, her situation failed to improve since he was struggling with drugs and debt. To buy her school uniform and other necessities, Ella began selling drugs the summer before she enrolled in high school. While her attendance in eighth grade was often spotty, it worsened throughout ninth grade. By the end of the semester, she had missed 27 out of 90 days. Ella then missed more than half of her second semester of ninth grade.





Jake was looking forward to high school. He enjoyed learning and was excited to play on the school football team. His parents valued education and encouraged him to do well, but Jake found that high school was more difficult than he had anticipated. When he met a couple of guys who were skipping classes to read comic books in the cafeteria, Jake started to join them. He found his math class, which took place right after lunch, to be particularly difficult. So, he would simply read comics in the cafeteria until math was over. Despite missing only two full days of school during his first semester of ninth grade, he was absent from math class 20 times.

These are only two examples of how truancy might play out, but they do reveal how it can stem from very different causes and manifest itself in very different ways. Ella's truancy is clearly based on missing full days of school due to problems at home, while Jake displayed truant behavior in only one class because he began to experience difficulties with that particular subject.

"Truancy is not the problem -- it's an indicator of other problems. When students aren't in school, we need to understand why they stay away before we can effect solutions."

- Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Office,
California Department of Education

By considering both full-day absences and skipping classes, educators can gain a broader conception of truancy and a more accurate sense of which students are experiencing some sort of barrier to learning.

Risk and Protective Factors

Truancy is a multifaceted problem; while there are some clear school-related variables that contribute to truant behavior among students, such behavior has also been linked with problems in other domains. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, correlates of truancy fall into the following categories:

School factors include issues related to the overall climate, such as a school's size and the attitudes of administrators, teachers, and other students, as well as the degree to which a school is flexible in meeting the diverse cultural and learning styles of students. Another important factor is the manner in which a school deals with truancy among students: Are clear procedures in place and consistently enforced? Do such procedures have meaningful consequences for students?

Family factors include lack of parent supervision and/or guidance, poverty, substance abuse in the home, domestic violence, lack of familiarity with school attendance laws, and varied education priorities.

Economic factors include employment among students as well as students who live in single-parent households, have parents with multiple jobs, and whose families lack affordable transportation and/or childcare.

Student factors include substance use, limited social and emotional competence, mental health problems, poor physical health, and lack of familiarity with school attendance laws.

Rather than comprising a fifth category, **community variables** -- which are clearly important when looking at the problem of truancy among youth -- are reflected throughout the four categories above. For example, economic conditions and culturally-based attitudes toward education (mentioned under family factors) could easily be considered community-related variables.

While examining the risk factors for substance use, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and violence is a critical step toward understanding these problem behaviors, such knowledge does not reveal *how* to actually reduce a young person's risk in these areas. The key to effective risk reduction actually lies in the exploration and comprehension of protective factors among youth. The resiliency literature indicates that many young people who are exposed to multiple risk factors for problem behaviors manage to steer clear of them, and it seems that the following classes of protective factors are responsible:

Protective factors inherent in the individual, including female gender, high intelligence, a positive social orientation, and a resilient temperament.

Protective factors related to social bonding: One of the most effective strategies for preventing problem behaviors among youth is to strengthen their bonds with positive, pro-social family members, adults outside of the family (e.g., teachers, coaches, youth leaders), and friends.

"Young people with strong, supportive relationships with families, friends, school, and community are invested in or committed to achieving the goals held by these groups. They are bonded to these groups. Young people who are bonded are less likely to do things that threaten that bond -- such as use drugs, become violent, or commit crimes."

- National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*

Healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior: Young people who consistently experience healthy attitudes and clear expectations for positive behavior within their families, schools, and communities are less likely to become involved in problem behaviors -- particularly if they have developed strong bonds to the individuals and social groups within these settings.

Truancy as a Predictor of Delinquency

In addition to the numerous personal and environmental challenges that contribute to truancy among students, researchers have also found that truancy itself seems to contribute to -- or at least correlate with -- a diverse array of problems among young people. In fact, researchers have linked low commitment to school to nearly all problem behaviors displayed during adolescence. Specifically, studies have established lack of commitment to school and truancy as risk factors for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquent behavior, and -- most obviously -- school dropout.

On the flip side, a strong commitment to school has been cited by numerous researchers as a protective factor against risky behaviors among youth.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency has found that truancy is a likely precursor to serious nonviolent and violent offenses among youth, and that the connection between truancy and delinquency seems to be particularly strong among males. In many jurisdictions, law enforcement officials have documented a connection between higher truancy rates and higher rates of daytime crimes, including burglary and vandalism.

It is clear that not all disruptive children -- including truants -- will become delinquents, and not all delinquents will become serious, violent, or chronic juvenile offenders. However, the majority of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders did begin to display problem behaviors during childhood. Since truancy has been linked to delinquency, as well as to a range of additional risky behaviors that also correlate with delinquency, it is a critical issue to address as early and effectively as possible.

Related Reading:

"Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems" by Eileen Garry. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, October 1996.

Social and Financial Impact of Truancy and School Dropout

When students are chronically truant from school, missing long stretches at a time, it seems like a tragically natural progression -- at some point -- to simply not return. Truancy is a well-established risk factor for school dropout, which is a very serious and all too common problem. Each year, approximately five out of every 100 high school students (five percent) drop out of school. Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth- through twelfth-grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program. However, a substantially higher proportion of students quit school for some period of time during their educational careers. For example, one longitudinal study found that 21 percent of students who were in eighth grade in 1988 had dropped out at some point between eighth grade and high school graduation, even though only 12 percent of them had actually failed to graduate by 1994. It is difficult to draw a clear line between chronic or extended truancy and periodic school dropout. In fact, truants are the young people most likely to drop out of school.

School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than youth who stay in school. In 1999 just over 14 percent of workers who had dropped out of school were poverty-stricken as compared with six percent of workers who had completed high school. The following are some powerful measures of the social and financial impact of truancy and the dropouts that result:

- Less educated workforce
- Business loss because of youth who "hang out" and/or shoplift during the day
- Higher daytime crime rates (in some cases)
- Cost of social services for families of children who are habitually truant
- Loss of federal and state education funding for schools

Truancy is a much more profound problem than might at first be obvious. There is a clear and powerful link between truancy and numerous risk factors and risk behaviors among young people.

National Scope of Truancy Problem

Between the years 1985 and 1998 there was a national increase of 67 percent in status offense cases involving truancy. This represents a 58 percent increase in the rate of truancy cases. Truancy cases comprised 29 percent of all status offense cases (Butts, et. al., 1996). While there is not an abundance of national truancy data, some metropolitan areas report thousands of unexcused absences each day.

- Philadelphia averages 20,000 students truant per day (Street, 2001).
- In public schools the absentee rate was highest in urban schools.
- Absentee rates generally increased with rates of student poverty as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Heaviside, 1998; Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2001).

During the 1996-97 school year, student absenteeism, tardiness, or class cutting (i.e., truancy) was one of the three discipline issues most often cited by public school principals as serious or moderate problems in their schools. Furthermore, principals in high schools were more likely to report this as a problem in 1997 than in 1991, an increase from 39 percent to 52 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Barriers to School Attendance

According to the *School Attendance Improvement Handbook* from the California Department of Education, the following are known barriers to student attendance:

- ★ Associating with the wrong kinds of friends
- ★ Feeling resentment toward authority
- ★ Putting time into a job to earn money for themselves or for their families
- ★ Using drugs or alcohol
- ★ Having problems relating to people
- ★ Being the victim of bullying
- ★ Feeling little support or experiencing conflict at home
- ★ Believing the school doesn't offer interesting, challenging, or rewarding classes or activities
- ★ Falling behind others in math or reading skills and skipping classes when not doing well, thereby perpetuating a lack of skills and a tendency to avoid school
- ★ Experiencing personal barriers, such as language problems, racial or cultural conflicts, embarrassment because of a lack of suitable or clean clothing, or teen pregnancy
- ★ Being held back a grade or more
- ★ Being suspended or expelled
- ★ Having transportation problems
- ★ Fearing community violence

Causes of Truancy

The literature consistently groups the causes of truancy into four categories with many contributing variables: 1) Student demographics; 2) Family characteristics; 3) Student's personal or psychological factors; 4) School climate including attachment to teachers, feelings of physical safety, as well as the effect of specific truancy policies.

Student demographics. Rates of truancy have been found to be higher among males, minorities, urban youth, low income families, children living with only one parent, children from large families, and children whose parents do not have high school degrees. Not surprisingly, rates of truancy increase as children get older (Baker, et al., 2001; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Jenkins, 1995).

Family characteristics. Demographic factors alone cannot adequately predict which children will attend school regularly and which will have poor attendance. Parental attention certainly has an effect on children's school attendance. Parent involvement with school and homework correlates with students having better attendance records (Corville-Smith, et al., 1998; Jenkins, 1995).

Personal or psychological factors. Students' psychological traits have an enormous influence over their daily decisions regarding whether to attend or skip school (King & Bernstein, 2001). Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, and Dalicandro (1998) found that truant students were less likely to perceive school experiences favorably and less likely to feel competent in the classroom. These students were more likely to experience family conflict and to feel academically inferior.

School climate. How students feel about their relationships at school is represented by the concept of "school attachment". A school's learning atmosphere or climate and discipline policies have an effect on school attachment among students. When a student feels an attachment to school through a web of relationships with other students, teachers, or a caring adult, it can help overcome many of the causes of truancy (Jenkins, 1995).

Pellerin (2000) found that, in general, students have the best attendance records in authoritative schools – those that make high demands and provide high levels of support – and the worst records in lenient schools – those that make few demands and provide little support. The effects of school type varied across racial/ethnic groups. Black students were affected more strongly by the parenting style of their school; they were more likely to drop out of schools with lax disciplinary demands. Asian students were found to drop out at a higher rate when both academic demands and discipline problems were high. School administrators need to consider the specific characteristics of their student body when developing policies and procedures that affect school climate.

A study of more than 17,000 middle and high school students in Colorado showed that risk and protective factors have an effect on truancy. Risk factors contributing to truancy included those related to safety: 1) fear of harm, 2) fear of victimization, and 3) abuse in the home. Protective factors associated with school attachment included: 1) high self-esteem, 2) positive school attitudes, 3) pro-social activities such as sports, clubs and volunteer work, and 4) positive attitudes toward police officers (Dukes & Stein, 2001).

Consequences of Truancy

Many studies describe the consequences of truancy:

- A study conducted in Florida on predicting which students would eventually drop out of high school found that the combination of increased absences and low grades was a significant predictor of early school termination (Morris, Ehren, & Lenz, 1991).
- A small school district in Kentucky showed that graduation rates could be radically improved by addressing truancy effectively. They achieved a 100 percent graduation rate three years in a row, attributing the success to a truancy reduction program (Beem, 2002).
- One study among 10th graders in Michigan found that truancy was the only statistically significant predictor of all the negative behaviors studied: cigarette use, alcohol use, binge drinking, and marijuana use (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002).
- Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies cited by Epstein & Sheldon (2002) show that students who are more often absent beginning as early as first grade are those students who eventually drop out of school. The pattern of absenteeism increases throughout a students' school attendance history.
- The Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders found that academic failure beginning in late elementary school and lack of commitment to school, for which school attendance was used as one measure, are risk factors for health and behavior problems (Catalano, Loeber, & McKinney, 1999).
- Larger studies confirm these findings. Data from a national adolescent health survey of thousands of seventh to twelfth graders attending 134 schools nationwide found that "frequent problems with school work," is a common trait among truant youth and is predictive of every health risk studied - cigarette, alcohol and drug use; weapon-related violence; suicidal thoughts or attempts; and early intercourse (Blum, et al., 2000). The authors concluded, "school failure is a public health problem."

Poor attendance and chronic absenteeism predict not only school dropout, but also are predictors of other negative consequences.

Risk Factors for Problem Behaviors Among Youth

	<i>Substance Use</i>	<i>Delinquency</i>	<i>Teenage Pregnancy</i>	<i>School Dropout</i>	<i>Violence</i>
Community					
Availability of drugs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Availability of firearms		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, firearms, and crime	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Media portrayals of violence					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Transitions and mobility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Low neighborhood attachment and community organization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Extreme economic deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Family					
Family history of the problem behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Family management problems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Family conflict	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Favorable parental attitudes toward and involvement in the problem behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
School					
Early and persistent antisocial behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Academic failure beginning in elementary school	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lack of commitment to school	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Individual/Peer					
Rebelliousness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Friends who engage in the problem behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Favorable attitudes toward the problem behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Early initiation of the problem behavior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Constitutional factors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Source: *Risk-Focused Prevention: Using Social Development Strategy* by J. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano. Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., 1995.

Chapter Two

Three Levels of Attendance Intervention

I. Prevention

A. The Importance of School Connectedness

How Connection Helps

Schools can be a place where students feel safe and connected or one where they dread walking in the front doors. Schools cannot address all the issues and problems that some students bring along with them, but studies show that schools can play a major role in how students feel about attending. Some educators and researchers refer to this process as school connectedness. When students feel cared for by teachers and others and feel like they are part of the school, they are less likely to engage in risky behavior, such as using drugs, engaging in violence, or starting sexual activity at an early age.

School connectedness refers to the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals. Robert Blum, one of the leading researchers in this area, recently oversaw a series of papers and a conference that sought to provide more definition and clarity to this term. According to Blum, school connectedness is influenced through:

- Individuals (students and school staff)
- Environment (school climate and school bonding)
- The culture of the school (social needs and learning priorities)

"What goes on in the classroom is key to keeping kids from becoming disenchanted with school. It doesn't matter whether you have 20 or 30 kids in a class. It doesn't matter whether the teacher has a graduate degree. What matters is the environment that a student enters when he walks through the classroom door."

- Robert Blum, M.D., Ph.D., professor and director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Adolescent Health and Development and the Add Health

Markers for Students' Connection to School

In the same issue of the *Journal of School Health*, Heather Libbey (2004) examined the literature and found that researchers use a variety of methods to measure school attachment or connection, yet there were some consistent themes that seemed to be markers for students' sense of connection at school:

Academic engagement. The extent to which students are motivated to learn and do well in school.

Belonging. This includes being proud of one's school, feeling respected, being able to talk to teachers, and feeling like school staff are interested in students.

Discipline/fairness. The extent to which students perceive the rules of the school to be enforced fairly.

Liking for school. Whether students looked forward to going to school.

Extracurricular activities. Participation in out-of-school activities.

Student voice. This includes, for example, opportunities for students to participate in decision making.

Peer relations. This includes the presence of friends and students' feelings of loneliness.

Safety. The extent to which students reported that they feel safe in school.

Teacher support. The most common theme that emerged from the literature review, this includes whether students feel close to or valued by teachers and school staff.

Ten Strategies That Foster Connection to School

For School Administrators

1. Brainstorm with students, faculty, staff, and parents simple changes that could make school a more pleasant place to be.
2. Create policies that are based on student, family, and neighborhood strengths and assets.
3. Turn mistakes into learning opportunities, rather than failures meriting punishment.
4. Acknowledge and honor accomplishments and all types of competencies, such as helpfulness, good citizenship, most improved performance, volunteerism, participation in decision making, and cessation of negative behavior.
5. Set high standards and challenge students to meet them.
6. Reinforce explicit expectations for positive behavior and academic success.
7. Encourage highly interactive teaching strategies.
8. Create a welcoming environment for all who come to the school.
9. Invite family and community members to take active and regular roles in the daily operation of the school.
10. Create a common vision of success, and keep it simple.

Source: Blum, R.W., McNeely, C.A., Rinehart, P.M. (2002). *The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota.

B. Connectedness Outcomes

A number of research studies have examined the link between school connectedness and outcomes, both health-related and academic. Findings from these studies are summarized below.

Health Outcomes

One of the most widely cited is the Adolescent Health Study, a comprehensive school-based study of the health-related behaviors of adolescents in the United States. Between 1994 and 1995, more than 90,000 students in grades 7 through 12 attending 132 U.S. schools answered questions about their lives. Administrators at participating schools also completed a questionnaire. A sample of 20,000 students who completed the school survey were later interviewed at home.

Sifting through the data, researchers found some of the most compelling evidence yet for the importance of school connectedness. In a 1997 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Michael D. Resnick and his colleagues report that school connectedness was a protective factor in the lives of young people.

Amplifying on these results in *Improving the Odds: The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens*, Robert Blum and Clea McNeely write, “When middle and high school students feel cared for by people at their school and when they feel like they are part of school, they are less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors. When they feel connected to school, they also report higher levels of emotional well-being.” In the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), researchers found that students who feel connected to school are:

- Less likely to use alcohol and illegal drugs
- Less likely to engage in violent or deviant behavior
- Less likely to become pregnant
- Less likely to experience emotional distress and suicidal thoughts or attempts.

Academic Outcomes

Researchers have also found links between school connectedness and academic outcomes. According to Adena M. Klum and James P. Connell (2004), “Researchers have found student engagement a robust predictor of student achievement and behavior in school regardless of socioeconomic status. Students engaged in school are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and have lower drop-out rates.”

Klum and Connell cite a study that examined the link between student engagement and achievement and behavior. Researchers measured student attendance and achievement in reading and math. The study found that elementary school students who reported high levels of engagement were 44 percent more likely to do well and 23 percent less likely to do poorly on the attendance and achievement index. Middle school students with high levels of engagement were 75 percent more likely to do well on the attendance and achievement index.

Strategies for Promoting School Connectedness

The most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school include the following:

- Implementing high standards and expectations, and providing academic support to all students.
- Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.
- Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.
- Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.
- Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.
- Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.

Source: National Center for School Engagement, www.truancy prevention.org

C. Social Development Strategy

Researchers J. David Hawkins, Richard Catalano, and colleagues at the University of Washington in Seattle developed the Social Development Strategy, which provides a theoretical foundation for prevention based on risk and protective factors. The strategy emphasizes two key protective factors:

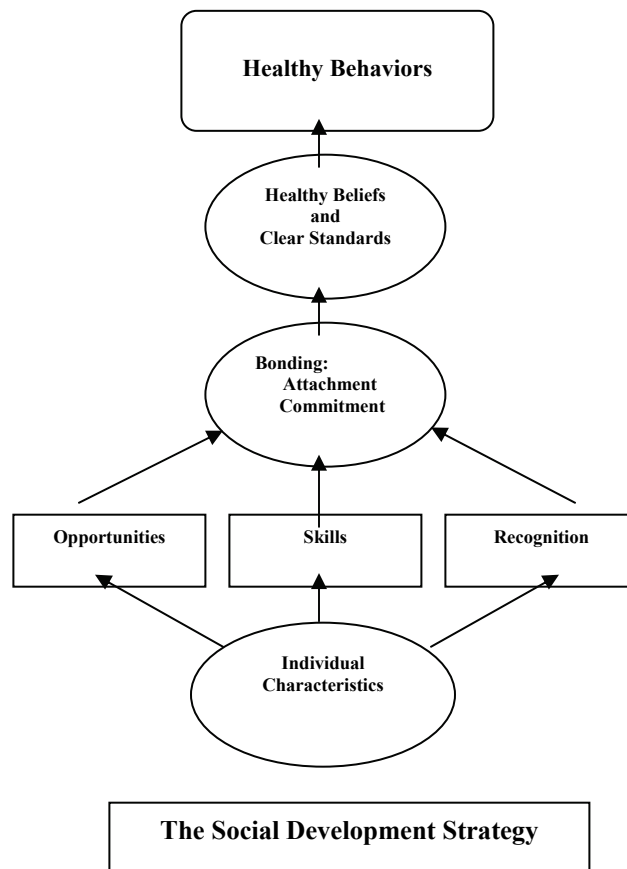
1. bonding to prosocial family, school, and peers, and
2. clear standards or norms for behavior.

The strategy focuses on three processes that promote these protective factors:

1. opportunities for involvement in productive roles,
2. developing skills to be successfully involved in these roles, and
3. consistent systems of recognition and reinforcement for prosocial involvement.

Research has indicated that these factors protect against the development of conduct problems, school misbehavior, truancy, and drug abuse.

The Social Development Strategy



Source: *Risk-Focused Prevention: Using Social Development Strategy* by J. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano. Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., 1995.

D. The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness

In 2003, a group of researchers, government officials and representatives from the health and educational fields came together at an invitational conference at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The conference's goal was to identify the latest knowledge about school connectedness and to synthesize a set of core principles to guide schools. Conference organizers commissioned six papers on school connectedness. They also consulted with federal and non-governmental agencies that are working to improve education in the United States. Based on the evidence presented in the papers and the small-group discussions, participants wrote a statement called “The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness.”

The Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness outlines “the most effective strategies for increasing the likelihood that students will be connected to school. Those strategies are:

- Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.
- Implementing high standards and expectations and providing academic support to all students.
- Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.
- Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.
- Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.
- Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.”
- Each of these elements of fostering connectedness are examined more closely below.

Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school

A single caring adult can make a big difference in a student's life. As coordinators, you have probably already seen that difference both in your relationships with students and as an observer in your schools. Research backs up the importance of caring adults in a student's life. According to Robert Blum, one of the key researchers on school connectedness, the relationship between students and school staff is at the center of school connectedness.

Unfortunately, not all students feel connected to a teacher or other adult at school. These students might be the quieter ones, or have behavior issues that make it harder for adults to connect with them. Yet these are the students who are often the most in need of being connected to a caring adult. To make sure that every student does feel close to at least one supportive adult, some schools have engaged in what is sometimes called “silent mentoring.”

What “silent mentoring” means is that teachers meet in a room with a list of all of the students posted on a wall. Teachers are given stickers and asked to place one next to each student they have a relationship with. Once everyone is finished, it will be clear which students have no connection with an adult in the school - they will have no stickers next to their names. Those are typically the students with behavior and other problems. Next, teachers sign up to silently build a relationship with those students. The students will never know that they have been picked out by teachers; otherwise they may feel like they are being targeted.

“The teachers just do it quietly and silently over time. Sure enough, the students' behavior improves.”

- Michael E. Kerosky, supervisor of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska

Proponents of this approach say that it is vital that students never see the initial lists of connected and unconnected students. They also say that it is critical to hold a debriefing session immediately after this activity to make a plan to address a school's challenges around connectedness. It can be a good idea to include other school staff in this exercise, such as custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries and paraprofessionals. These staff members are rarely asked for their input or help. Asking them to take responsibility for mentoring some students could increase their own connectedness to the school.

Faculty Meeting on School Connectedness

Teachers are key participants in creating and nurturing school connectedness. Asking for their thoughts and suggestions about school connectedness can help them feel invested in improving the school's climate and students' engagement. Here are some suggestions for conducting a faculty meeting on connectedness:

1. Provide a brief overview of the research on and the theory of connectedness. Include the key findings on student health and academic outcomes.
2. Ask the faculty to fill out a brief survey on connectedness. Here are some questions you might want to ask with responses ranging from 1 (indicating strongly agree) to 5 (indicating strongly disagree):
 - Each student is connected with at least one caring adult at school.
 - Teachers treat one another with respect.
 - Teachers know about their students' lives outside of school.
 - Student discipline practices and policies are fair.
 - The school environment is safe for students and teachers.
 - Teachers value what students have to say.
3. You might also ask them to describe key obstacles they face in building relationships with students, for example:
 - Using teaching time for classroom management
 - External circumstances that affect students (e.g., financial, social, family)
 - Not having enough time to get to know students as individuals
 - Differing ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds
 - Other (explain)
4. Have the questions written on the board or on a flip chart. Ask faculty for their responses to each question and to elaborate on those responses. In discussion, point out how their responses are linked to connectedness. For example, if a teacher says that the discipline policies are not consistent, talk about how that affects connectedness.
5. Ask them what areas of connectedness they think need to be addressed.
6. If they need ideas, give them examples, including “silent mentoring” and cooperative discipline practices.
7. Make an action plan and assign teachers to follow through.
8. Collect the responses.
9. Make plans to follow up in future faculty meeting.

Source: Susan Parker (Web course writer), Ann Nargi (high school teacher), and www.whatkidscando.org

Implementing high standards and expectations and providing academic support to all students.

Students, like most people, tend to rise to the expectations others have of them. According to *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students Motivation to Learn*, many studies show that students achieve high levels of performance in schools that have high standards and expectations for student learning. What's more, students want those high expectations.

In a telephone survey of 1,000 randomly selected high school students, 66 percent stated that they would learn more if their teachers “would challenge students to constantly do better and learn more.” Just 33 percent reported that their teachers did this. The *Engaging Schools* report goes on to state that an even higher proportion of African American students (79 percent compared to 63 percent of white students) stated that they would learn more if their teachers challenged them more.

But it isn't enough to have high expectations if those expectations are not accompanied by caring support from teachers and others. If students are not given the support - or “scaffolding,” as one researcher has called it - they can fail to meet those expectations and become frustrated and more, rather than less, connected to school.

Educators and researchers note that students need work that is challenging but also achievable. If the work is too easy, students will become bored. If it's too difficult, they will not develop confidence in their abilities. Much of this task falls to teachers, who are faced with the challenge of meeting the different needs and abilities of their students.

Teachers, however, do not have to be alone in this important work. Rachel Carson School in inner-city Chicago serves a population of low-income, mostly Latino students. In 1991, only 11 percent of the students were on level for reading and only 14 percent were on level for math, according to Ann Tysiak, assistant principal at Rachel Carson. Children not only struggled with academics, but with social issues as well, Tysiak says. School officials were clear that they needed to stress high standards and give students and their families the support they needed.

“If you lower your expectations, that's as high as they will go,” Tysiak says. *“If they are not exposed to a high level of curriculum, they'll never learn. You also need to provide the support. If we didn't, we'd still have the statistics [we started out with].”*

School officials did not assume that every child who was struggling needed special education. Instead, they hired an interventionist who works with teachers who have children who are having difficulty keeping up in class. Through classroom observations and meetings, the interventionist determines the child's needs. For example, the student might need homework help with special tutoring, or academic interventions that the specialist can suggest to the teacher.

Often the interventionist will engage the parents in helping, such as finding a place at home where the child can do homework, and deciding who will read to the child. The careful attention to each child's needs is paying off. Today, 57 percent of the students are on level for reading and 72 percent are on level for math.

Ten Strategies That Foster Connection to School For Teachers

1. Help students get to know one another's (and your) strengths.
2. Involve students in planning, problem solving, identifying issues, and assessing curriculum in the classroom.
3. Promote cooperation over competition. Post everyone's best work. Offer opportunities for the class to work together to help everyone achieve their level of excellence.
4. Build a strong relationship with each student.
5. Convey attentiveness to students and excitement about learning through nonverbal gestures.
6. Involve all students in chores and responsibilities around the classroom.
7. Integrate concepts of discipline and respect for classmates throughout instruction.
8. Give students more say in what they will learn.
9. Involve students in developing the criteria by which their work will be assessed, and provide guidelines so that they clearly understand what is expected of them.
10. Use first person plural (we, us, let's) when presenting classroom activities.

Source: Blum, R.W., McNeely, C.A., Rinehart, P.M. (2002). *The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota.

The National Academy of Sciences has identified four principles of engaging schools:

1. high academic standards,
2. personalization,
3. relevance, and
4. flexibility.

To promote high academic standards, teachers use two strategies to hold students accountable for work completion and performance:

- Avoiding placing students in tracks (e.g., vocational and college tracks), and
- Teaching the same core curriculum to all students.

Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.

In well-managed classrooms, students and teachers discuss and agree on disciplinary policies at the beginning of the school year, Blum says. Classrooms will typically have three or four rules that are posted so that students and teachers can easily remember them and refer to them. When the rules are broken, teachers and students discuss what happened and come to resolution, rather than simply sending students to the principal's office. It is also critical that the rules are equitably enforced (for example, exceptions are not made for star athletes).

At Ridgewood Middle School in Arnold, Missouri, teachers and students sign “social contracts,” according to Kristen Pelster, assistant principal. These social contracts give students a voice in how their class is run. It is a different approach from having students come in at the beginning of a school year and be presented with a series of rules by the teacher, says Pelster. Instead, students sit around a circle and a teacher asks them three questions:

1. How would you like to be treated?
2. How do you think I would like you to treat me?
3. How would you like us to treat each other?

With that information, the students decide what they should do if those needs are not met. They write a social contract and place it on the wall so that it is visible.

According to an article by Clea McNeely and colleagues in the *Journal of School Health* (2004), the Add Health study found that when schools have harsh or punitive discipline policies, students feel less connected to school. However, it was unclear whether the more restrictive school policies are a response to a high number of disconnected students and their behavior problems, or whether punitive discipline policies alienate students from school.

As it is probably difficult to feel connected to a harsh parent who has unbending rules and severe consequences for breaking those rules, it is likely difficult for students to feel connected to a school with punitive disciplinary policies. What's more, students who are forced to leave school, either through suspension, expulsion, or being sent to an alternative school, are not likely to increase their connectedness to or engagement with school. Other approaches address discipline problems but do so by preventing problem behavior from occurring or escalating.

When discipline problems occur, effective schools have early intervention policies and procedures in place. School staff see these problems as early warning signs that students need additional support. They provide that support without labeling the students or removing them from regular classrooms. Even with intensive intervention, some students may still act out. Model schools identified by experts use interventions to help students learn from their actions, take responsibility, make amends, and change their behavior. At the same time, the student stays identified with the school community and its caring norms and expectations.

Components of a Successful Prevention Program

In *Safe, Drug-Free, and Effective Schools for ALL Students: What Works!*, the authors outline the components of a successful prevention program:

- Clearly defined behavioral expectations
- Consistent implementation of discipline procedures and well-defined and consistently-delivered consequences for behavior
- Teaching of appropriate behavior to staff and students
- Support for staff and students in achieving high behavioral and academic standards
- Ongoing monitoring and dissemination of data collected to all staff
- Positive recognition and public acknowledgment of appropriate behavior
- Options that allow teachers to continue instruction when behavior problems occur and crisis intervention plans for dangerous behavior
- Engaging student-centered instruction
- Collaboration between regular and special educators and links to other school reform efforts
- Collaboration with family, community, and service providers
- Leadership that is committed to serving all students .

Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.

Cossitt Elementary School in La Grange, Illinois, began implementing the comprehensive Caring School Community project in 1996. The project calls for principals, teachers, administrators, students, and families to make some significant changes in the way they view education. For teachers, one of the biggest shifts is to incorporate more collaborative ways of learning into their teaching, in part so that students feel more connected to their school. Or as principal Mary Tavegia puts it, “A lot of this was teachers learning to give up control to kids. It’s a huge shift in thinking.”

If teachers were going to have to learn a more collaborative way of interacting with students, then Tavegia would have to model that collaboration to her teachers.

Tavegia also makes it a point to write handwritten notes to all 70 staff members at her school twice a year - the teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodians. She writes the first note within the first two weeks of school. Each note mentions something specific the staff member has done to help the school, including challenges they have dealt with. Tavegia also lets them know that they can come see her with any concerns. She hopes that her notes and the way she treats the staff will filter down to the way that the staff interact with the students, including writing similar notes to the students.

In the Anchorage School District, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Supervisor Michael Kerosky says, “We tell principals to feed the staff so they don’t eat the kids. If the staff feels important and challenged and gets constructive feedback, they will respond the same way kids will when teachers treat them that way.”

One way that the Anchorage School District has fed the teachers and other school staff is by creating book clubs for them. At Taku Elementary school, the staff book club includes teachers' aides, noon duty monitors, teachers, the family school service coordinator, and the counselor. Among the topics they have discussed is brain research and youth development.

Administrators learned that often parents were pulling out their children to translate for them for medical and other appointments. In response, school administrators provided a social worker to help parents make medical appointments and find translators. There is now a bank at the school that parents use, and the school has bussed mothers to mammogram appointments.

In addition, Rachel Carson holds monthly parent meetings that more than 100 parents attend. The meetings address concerns of the parents, such as how to

maintain their authority over their children in the midst of omnipresent gangs in the neighborhood. Meetings have also addressed how parents can approach teachers. In addition, teachers call parents at the beginning of each school year and introduce themselves so that the first contact a parent has with a teacher is positive. School administrators also work closely to accommodate parents who, for example, might like a particular teacher and want a younger child to have that teacher.

Connectedness Provides Indirect Link to Academic Achievement

In a review of studies that looked at the link between supportive schools and academic success, Eric Schaps found that a sense of community at school may have a direct effect on students' enjoyment of school, educational aspirations, academic motivation and engagement, and tendency to stay in school. Schaps found that building community in schools does not seem to have a direct effect on achievement as measured by grades or test scores. Instead, a safe and supportive school tends to encourage motivation and engagement, which then leads to higher academic grades and test scores. Schaps concluded that building a sense of community may not be sufficient, particularly for low-income students and students of color, without a concurrent "academic press" that consisted of strong norms and expectations at the school that encourage academic effort and achievement.

Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.

When Kathleen Mayer took over as principal of Rachel Carson in 1991, she inherited a school in chaos.

"We had discipline problems, little time on task, and most of the time with children on the bench [in the principal's office]," Mayer says. "We had students from different gangs, and the whole day was, 'Who stole my stuff? Who carved in my desk?' It was torture for everybody."

Mayer wanted to restore some order and teaching to the school, which was not going to happen if students were constantly running in the halls and being sent out of the classroom. But to make matters more complicated, some teachers felt like it was not worth it to try to teach children who were only in the classroom for 40 minutes - if they were there at all.

Mayer encouraged those teachers to leave, and eventually they did. She says that she was fortunate because the school population doubled, and she had to hire many new teachers. It was her chance to find teachers who agreed with her philosophy. Those teachers in turn sat on the hiring committees of new teachers who believed that children were capable of learning and self-discipline.

Good teachers need support once they are hired. Kristen Pelster had a similar problem with some teachers at Ridgewood Middle School who believed that the population of children could not learn or behave. At an initial faculty meeting, Pelster and the principal laid out their vision for the school. They said it would be hard work and that they would expect a lot from the teachers. If the teachers did not agree with the vision or the expectations, they should leave, Pelster recalls saying. A lot of the teachers did leave the school. With new teachers on board who shared the school's philosophy, Pelster and her colleagues began providing professional development to support them. For example, the school's social contracts mentioned earlier depend on effective classroom meetings to work. But most teachers have no training in running classroom meetings. The school has brought in trainers on running effective class meetings. Eric Schaps from the Developmental Studies Center, which spearheaded the Caring School Community project, said that professional development is essential if teachers are going to be able to help students feel more connected to their school.

"Many, if not most, teachers need professional development in order to run effective class meetings," Schaps says. "Teachers need group management skills that they may or may not have. When they put kids in a circle and open up potentially sensitive opportunities for kids to talk about their problems, they need facilitation skills. How do you really listen to kids? How do you move it along and get to the right level of depth? Many teachers lack the skills to help kids stop and reflect on what they learned. This is such an important learning approach, and a lot of teachers never learned that and don't do it and need the help."

According to Schaps, teachers need both instructional materials and professional development to implement changes. They cannot make changes simply with new materials or a professional development class. What's more, staff development needs to be ongoing, have continuity, and provide opportunities for practice and getting back together to improve and learn from one another.

In the Anchorage School District in Alaska, Title I teachers have a program in which small groups of teachers observe other teachers recognized for their literacy instruction skills. The groups observe the teacher experts six times throughout the year, two days at a time. At the end of each day, participants meet with a facilitator and the teacher experts to discuss aspects of teaching. Another opportunity is a one-month teacher exchange program where a "learner" teacher applies to be matched with a more experienced host. The learner teacher works alongside the host teacher for two weeks. Then the host joins the learner's classroom to help integrate the new learning into the classroom. One participant described it as "the best professional development possible."

Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.

Parents are key allies in a school's efforts to increase students' connection to school. Studies indicate that the quality of the relationship between home and school is connected to a student's improved achievement and behavior. The Search Institute has found that when parents are engaged in their children's schooling, those children tend to have a higher commitment to education and fewer problems in school, including with high-risk behaviors.

But it can be difficult to connect parents with school, especially those who had difficulty in school themselves. For them, school is likely an aversive place, Blum says. School staff need to find ways to reach out to all parents, and to these parents in particular.

Kathleen Mayer, the principal of Rachel Carson Elementary School, faced some daunting obstacles in gaining parents' support when she became principal. The school had a reputation as a chaotic, disorganized place with low test scores. Many parents did not want to send their children there. What's more, the school had begun mandatory summer school sessions, and many of the parents, who were from Mexico, pulled their children from school to come with them to visit their homeland.

As mentioned earlier, parents also often took children out of school to accompany them to medical and other appointments where they needed help with translation. The school social worker helped arrange medical appointments and translation services. School staff also helped with a variety of other problems that parents faced.

Mayer, who speaks Spanish, says that she will often talk to parents about what is going on in their lives.

"We had to get families comfortable in telling us about their problems," Mayer says. "Before Christmas, a mother came in crying who I didn't know real well. She had just gotten a bill from the hospital and had a hard time understanding it. The father had left his job because of illness, and they were cutting off the medical coverage. The mother had health issues. We have a partnership with a well-to-do school. They give us food coupons and book bags full of things that kids need. We try to do it discreetly. I asked her if she wanted some things for Christmas. She said yes, and I told her to call when she was ready to pick it up so that the kids wouldn't see it."

Mayer and her colleagues began meeting with parents and emphasizing the importance of attendance for their children's education. They also learned about the parents' needs and began to meet some of them. The school began offering English as a Second Language and GED courses for the parents. Watching their parents attend school is an important message and model for the children, Mayer says. It also reinforces to the parents the importance of school. The school started holding orientation meetings by grade level so that the parents do not have to choose between grades.

Ann Tysiak, assistant principal at Rachel Carson, says that the school also holds classes for students and parents to help them prepare for state tests. The parents were able to see what kind of work their children need to do to prepare for the tests and how they can help them get ready, such as providing a workplace at home for homework.

How Schools Can Help Parents Create a Home Environment That Is Supportive of Education

Schools can provide:

- Workshops, videos, and phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age/grade level
- Parent education, GED prep and family literacy classes, and college credit
- Family support programs to help with nutrition and health services
- Home visits at key school transition points

Source: Robert Blum, professor and chair, Department of Population and Family Health Sciences, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The Importance of Parental Support in School Connectedness

According to the Search Institute, parental support is vital in building a student's connectedness to school. The Search Institute reports that research found that “family or parent involvement has a significant impact on students' well-being and success in school [in the following ways]:

Increased commitment to education. When parents are involved in school, students tend to have higher levels of commitment to their own education. A recent analysis of parent involvement by the Search Institute for the General Mills Foundation found that 6th-12th grade students with involved parents tend to be more motivated in school and more committed to continuing education beyond high school.

Reduced school problems. Similarly, a Child Trends report found that 6th-12th grade students whose parents are highly involved in their education are less likely to experience various problems at school (*Running in Place: How American Families Are Faring in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society*, 1994). For example, 26 percent of students with highly involved parents are in the bottom half of their class, compared to 56 of those whose parents are minimally involved. And 11 percent of youth with highly involved parents have repeated a grade, compared to 25 percent of those whose parents are minimally involved. Indeed, some research suggests that parent involvement is a more powerful predictor of student behavior than family income.

Reduced high-risk behaviors. The Search Institute analysis found that problem behaviors, such as alcohol use, violence, and anti-social behavior, decrease as parent involvement increases.

Increased after-school involvement. Parent involvement is a strong predictor of levels of involvement in extracurricular and non-school activities, Child Trends reports. Overall, 42 percent of youth with low-involvement parents are involved in non-school activities, such as scouting, religious youth groups, or non-school sports, compared to 79 percent of youth with high-involvement parents.”

Source: www.search-institute.org

E. Strategies That Work

Researchers have found many common elements among approaches that successfully keep students attending and engaged in school. They have also found some tactics that do not work.

STRATEGY 1: *Create a climate that encourages students to become connected to their schools.*

Students are more likely to become engaged in their studies if the school offers a challenging, creative curriculum and a climate that allows them to play a role in decision making that is developmentally appropriate. Having a safe school where students do not fear bullying also helps attendance.

STRATEGY 2: *Establish firm and consistent sanctions for truancy.*

Students and parents need to know a school's attendance policies and the sanctions for not following them. The first day of school, schools should send home letters informing parents that officials take attendance seriously.

To reinforce this message, schools can print information about their attendance policy on school lunch flyers, make announcements at open house events, and discuss the policy at parent-teacher conferences. Schools can also post attendance milestones on their community bulletin boards that list the percentage of students who attend each day or week.

STRATEGY 3: *Establish a community norm for school attendance.*

Community partners can do much to reinforce a school district's policy on regular attendance. Some communities have erected billboards around town or aired public service announcements that emphasize the importance of attendance. In Seattle, the Juvenile Services Division at King County Superior Court has put up posters on the back of buses where students, include those skipping school, are likely to sit. The message talks about the consequences of dropping out of school, citing such facts as high school dropouts earn half the income as high school graduates. Businesses near schools can be enlisted by asking them not to serve students during school hours and by giving them phone numbers for local truancy centers where police take students found out of school during school hours. Some communities have also set daytime curfews to ensure that students are in school. Students found violating the curfew are often taken to truancy centers, rather than court, where staff learn more about them and connect them with community or school services.

“School resource officers can help set a school standard for attendance and accountability by walking into the school office and seeing who is not there and knowing the kids who are in that group. . . If the school resource officer takes it as part of his work, then that becomes an effective way of communicating to kids that someone is watching.”

- Ken Seeley, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children.

STRATEGY 4: *Have a system in place to notify parents when their child is truant.*

NOTE: Virginia law requires that parents be notified of student absences. Information on requirements and descriptions of strategies for complying with the law are included in Chapter Three.

Schools must have a way to notify parents quickly that their children are absent from school. Many schools have used computer-generated calls to homes. But students know how to intercept those calls, so experts recommend that truant officers call parents at work in the morning rather than at night at the home.

STRATEGY 5: *Establish discipline policies that bring students back into schools.*

Schools should develop discipline policies that do not unnecessarily remove students from class, according to the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Out-of-school suspensions and even in-school suspensions can mean that a student falls further behind in work and is even less motivated to start attending. In addition, according to Ken Seeley, it is counterproductive to punish a student for missing school by telling him or her to stay away from school. Many schools have set up after-school suspensions or Saturday suspensions that discipline students but also allow them to begin catching up with their school work.

Experts also suggest that schools conduct ongoing curriculum reviews to encourage courses that are relevant to all students, and to develop alternative methods of earning academic credit, such as independent study. Some schools have policies that if students miss a certain number of classes, they automatically receive an F. According to the University of Minnesota Center for Adolescent Health and Development, those policies simply push students to leave school for good, Seeley said. Even if a school gives a student an incomplete instead, he or she has a chance to make up the work and still graduate or move to the next grade.

Researchers in the Adolescent Health project found that school connectedness is lower in schools with harsher discipline policies, such as those that impose out-of-school suspension or even expulsion for a first-time offense. The project director cautioned that it is not clear from the data whether harsh discipline policies make students feel less connected to school or whether some other factor is causing the correlations. Policies that retain students in their grade, rather than allowing them to go to the next level, have also been shown to increase the potential that students will drop out of school.

STRATEGY 6: *Include parents in plans to address truancy.*

Parents are one of the most important factors in determining whether their children will attend school regularly. Parents communicate their values about school. If they had a negative school experience, they may be suspicious of school officials who are calling about their absent child. Schools will have more success if they enlist parents as their allies in helping children get the education they need.

Schools need to find ways to communicate to parents about the positive qualities of their children. Parents, especially those of middle schoolers, often need help to deal with their suddenly distant and sometimes hostile child. While elementary schools often have many programs for parents, far fewer are available at the secondary level. Schools can win parents' loyalty by providing them with tools to help navigate the adolescent years, such as a parent guide that includes information on parenting classes as well as resources to help the parent in job skill training, social services, and tips on helping students with homework. In addition, family festivals, notes from the principals and teachers, and parent-teacher luncheons can strengthen the bond between parents and their children's schools and help parents feel like they are important partners in education.

STRATEGY 7: *Establish programs at school that meet the unique needs of each student.*

These programs could include school breakfast and lunch programs, mentorship efforts through community and religious groups, and after-school programs and sports. Some

programs also offer children at risk of truancy a chance to develop skills, such as programs where they mentor younger children and get paid for it.

STRATEGY 8: *Include students in plans to address truancy and ask for their input.*

Youth in San Francisco have trained truancy officers. In one community when a youth curfew was being set, the youth were involved in the process. They set the parameters of the policy and then educated their peers about the curfew, why it was set, and the consequences of failing to comply with the curfew.

Universal Interventions that Can Help Build Connectedness

Ask principals to stand outside each day and greet students by name.

Ask teachers to stand outside their classrooms between classes and greet students.

Enlist students, teachers, and parents in cleaning up the school and taking responsibility for its physical upkeep.

Build in professional development to help faculty learn the practical steps in building connectedness, such as classroom management.

Have principals model respectful behavior toward teachers and other school staff. This can include holding collaborative meetings, asking for their input, being available to talk, and writing handwritten notes to each staff member.

Give students a voice in classroom management and in classroom work.

Establish, with student input, a discipline code that is fair. Find ways to keep students with behavior problems in school rather than relying on out-of-school suspensions.

Provide students with meaningful opportunities to participate in school and community governance. Give them leadership opportunities and chances to teach others about respectful behavior.

Place students in smaller groups in secondary schools and with the same teachers to build cohesion.

Establish advisory periods where students can get to know one another and build connections.

Go to the parents, find out what their needs are, and work to meet them (for example, by offering parenting, ESL, or GED classes). That may mean going out into the community rather than asking parents to come to school.

Source: *School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation*,
<http://www.k12coordinator.org/onlinece/onlineevents/connect/>

Key Considerations for an Effective Attendance Program

1. Does our school have an effective attendance policy? Yes ___ No ___
2. Is our attendance policy clear to everyone? Yes ___ No ___
3. Is the local law enforcement agency a member of our attendance team? Yes ___ No ___
4. Does our school have a wide variety of extracurricular activities? Yes ___ No ___
5. Is good attendance positively reinforced among the staff? Yes ___ No ___
6. Are students involved in the decisions that affect them? Yes ___ No ___
7. Does a dropout identification and prevention program exist? Yes ___ No ___
8. Are our attendance-taking procedures student-proof? Yes ___ No ___
9. Is our attendance communicated regularly to staff, students, and parents? Yes ___ No ___
10. Does our school have an effective counseling program with an attendance component? Yes ___ No ___
11. Do opportunities exist for the nontraditional pursuit of a high school diploma? Yes ___ No ___
12. Are social skills and responsibility training offered as a part of the school's curriculum? Yes ___ No ___
13. Is there consistent enforcement of all policies for students and staff? Yes ___ No ___
14. Does a school newsletter exist that publicizes the school's activities as well as attendance and disciplinary patterns? Yes ___ No ___
15. Do our staff members have opportunities for inservice activities addressing such issues as teaching styles, cultural awareness, classroom management, and skills in community relations? Yes ___ No ___
16. Is attendance taken each period? Yes ___ No ___
17. Are parents contacted on each absence? Yes ___ No ___
18. Are absences monitored weekly? Yes ___ No ___
19. Is attendance improvement part of the districtwide goals and objectives? Yes ___ No ___
20. Do all personnel know our current percentages of attendance? Yes ___ No ___

From: *Do You Have a Leak in Your ADA?* Los Angeles County Office of Education, 1990

10 Things A School Can Do to Improve Attendance

Source: Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

1. Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome. Make a point to say “hello” to every parent/guardian or student you see in the halls and outside--make it your business to know his or her names.
2. Create an environment that enables students to feel successful in something—no matter how small it may seem. Award academic and attendance “letters,” as you do for athletics.
3. When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent/guardian — not their answering machine. Make a personal phone call in the evening, or call parents/guardians at work during the day.
4. When a student is absent, immediately talk with the student about why he or she was not at school—let students know you are aware...and that you care that they are at school.
5. Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to help keep students in school during school hours. Create a poster that states “We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 18 during school hours.”
6. Forge a relationship with local law enforcement—make them your allies in showing the community, families, and students that school is the place to be. Empower community law enforcement to return youth to school.
7. Don’t provide the temptation for youth to be truant. Close your campuses during breaks and lunch.
8. Empower and expect classroom teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant. Ask teachers to make calls to absent youth or families in the afternoon or evenings.
9. Reward and recognize good attendance—not just perfect attendance. Post large signs giving the daily attendance for the day. Reward individuals, classes, and the school for increased attendance.
10. Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected. Adopt a character education program that is planned and implemented by students.

Effective Strategies for Parent and Community Involvement

Source: The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education.

- Assess families' needs and interests about ways of working with the schools.
- Set clear and measurable objectives based on parent/guardian and community input to help foster a sense of cooperation and communication among families, communities, and schools.
- Hire and train a parent/family liaison to directly contact parents/guardians and coordinate family activities. The liaison should be bilingual as needed and sensitive to the needs of family and the community, including the non-English speaking community.
- Develop multiple outreach mechanisms to inform families, businesses, and the community about family involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, and local newspapers.
- Recognize the importance of a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural resources in generating interest in family involvement.
- Use creative forms of communication between educators and families that are personal, goal-oriented, and make optimal use of new communication technologies.
- Mobilize parents/families as volunteers in the school assisting with instructional tasks, meal service, and administrative office functions. Family members might also act as invited classroom speakers and volunteer tutors.
- Provide staff development for teachers and administrators to enable them to work effectively with families and with each other as partners in the educational process.
- Ensure access to information about nutrition, healthcare, services for individuals with disabilities, and support provided by schools or community agencies.
- Schedule programs and activities flexibly to reach diverse family groups.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities on a regular basis.

F. Programs That Build School Connectedness

1. Seattle Social Development Project

The Seattle Social Development Project is one of the oldest projects that specifically aim to increase students' sense of connectedness or bonding to their elementary schools. The project started in 1981 in eight Seattle public elementary schools that were located in high-crime neighborhoods. The intervention was provided to selected classrooms of first grade students, their parents, and their teachers. The students received the intervention throughout elementary school.

Teachers were responsible for three components:

1. Proactive classroom management that establishes consistent classroom expectations and routines at the start of the year
2. Interactive teaching that gave teachers techniques designed to motivate students to learn
3. Cooperative learning that involves small teams of students of different abilities and backgrounds as learning partners.

Children received a curriculum in using cognitive and social skills, and parents received optional training classes that were appropriate to the developmental level of the children. A school-wide replication of the project, Raising Healthy Children, was started in 1992.

According to a report by the Social Development Research Group (SDRG), studies of the Seattle project showed that children who participated in elementary school showed increased school bonding and achievement and reduced problem behavior. In addition, during middle and high school - a time when bonding typically decreases for all students - the level of school bonding declined less for the full intervention students than for the control students. One of the goals of this and other elementary school programs is to give children early and sustained intervention that will put them on a positive developmental track through secondary school and into adulthood.

Components of the Seattle Social Development Project and Raising Healthy Children Program

Components of Teacher Training

Proactive classroom management

- Establish consistent classroom expectations and routines at the beginning of the year.
- Give clear, explicit instructions for behavior.
- Recognize and reward desirable student behavior and efforts to comply.
- Use methods that keep minor classroom disruptions from interrupting instruction.

Interactive teaching to motivate learners

- Assess and activate foundation knowledge before teaching.
- Teach to explicit learning objectives.
- Model skills to be learned.
- Frequently monitor student comprehension as material is presented.
- Re-teach material when necessary.

Cooperative learning

- Involve small teams of students of different ability levels and backgrounds as learning partners.
- Provide recognition to teams for academic improvement of individual members.

Effective reading instruction

- Balanced reading (guided reading, shared reading, reading aloud, and reading alone).
- Direct instruction in teaching word recognition and phonetic skills.

Teacher coaching – to reinforce effective practices.

Teachers peering in on peers – to provide helpful feedback.

Components of Child Social and Emotional Skill Development

Interpersonal problem-solving skills

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Communication | Giving compliments |
| Decision making/Problem solving | Sharing |
| Negotiation | Recognizing feelings |
| Conflict resolution | Tattling vs. reporting |
| Listening | Using good manners |

Refusal skills

- Recognize social influences to engage in problem behaviors.
- Identify consequences of problem behaviors.
- Generate and suggest alternatives.
- Invite peers to join in alternatives.

Summer camp for social skills and reading – Providing year round opportunities.

Components of Parent training

Behavior management skills

- Observe and pinpoint desirable and undesirable child behaviors.
- Teach expectations for behaviors.
- Provide consistent positive reinforcement for desired behavior.
- Provide consistent and moderate consequences for undesired behaviors.

Academic support skills

- Initiate conversations with teachers about children's learning.
- Help children develop reading and math skills.
- Create a home environment supportive of learning.

Skills to reduce risks for drug use

- Establish a family policy on drug use.
- Practice refusal skills with children.
- Use self-control skills to reduce family conflict.
- Create new opportunities in the family for children to contribute and learn.

School home coordinator to coordinate intervention – linking parents to needed services and support.

Source: Catalano R.F., Haggerty, K.P., Oesterle, S., Fleming, C.B., & Hawkins, J.D. (September, 2004). The Importance of Bonding to School for Healthy Development: Findings from the Social Development Research Group. *Journal of School Health*, 7(74), 252-261.

2. The Caring School Community

The Caring School Community (CSC) project is a whole-school reform that seeks to help elementary schools become caring communities that foster students' social, ethical, and intellectual development. CSC emphasizes the promotion of positive development among all children and youth, rather than the prevention of disorder among those deemed at risk.

According to the Developmental Studies Center, the CSC project has been evaluated in several studies over the past 20 years. One study looked at the effects in middle school of the elementary school program. The study looked at six CSC schools and six comparison schools. Three of the six CSC schools had widely implemented the project, while the other three were considered “low implementers.”

Researchers found that compared with students in the other schools, CSC students appeared to be much more connected to school (e.g., had a greater sense of the school as a community, liked school more, worked harder and were more engaged in their courses, had greater trust in and respect for teachers and had higher educational aspirations). The study also found the following for the high-implementing schools:

- Students had significantly higher test scores and grades in core academic subjects.
- Students were more involved in positive youth activities.
- Students engaged in less misconduct at school and fewer delinquent behaviors than did comparison students.

CSC is designed to help elementary schools become caring learning communities that effectively support students' academic, social, and ethical development. Its goal is to help students develop the academic and practical skills needed to function productively in society, and the ethical and social skills needed to function humanely and wisely.

The original program, which was extensively evaluated in a six-district, four state study, has recently been revised to strengthen it academically and make it easier, less costly, and more flexible to implement. Its three complementary components are as follows:

Caring School Community: Four approaches for building students' “sense of community” and fostering parent involvement: (a) class meetings that build supportive relationships and shared goals within the classroom, (b) a cross-age “buddies” program, (c) school-wide community-building and service activities, and (d) home-based parent-involvement activities that help students connect their experiences at home with their experiences at school.

Making Meaning: Strategies That Build Comprehension and Community: A reading comprehension program that provides a structured, week-by-week curriculum at each grade level, K-6, for teaching nine comprehension strategies (e.g., questioning, making inferences, summarizing) that are central for students to understand what they are reading and that can be applied to a wide range of narrative and expository texts. The program uses direct teaching strategies that integrate academic and social development. Read-alouds of quality, multicultural literature and expository text, teacher-facilitated discussions, explicit teaching of strategies, and guided and independent practice in the use of the strategies form the core of instruction.

SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words): The SIPPS decoding program has three levels of instruction designed for flexible groupings of students in grades K-3, and is also used as an intervention program with older students. The program helps students develop the word-recognition skills that enable them to become fluent readers.

3. Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programming (SEL)

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, high-quality SEL programming has two primary features: (1) creating schools and classrooms that are safe, caring, well-managed, and participatory, and (2) teaching a core set of social and emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). Through both approaches, students should develop a greater attachment to school. An example of SEL might be conflict resolution, where students learn how to work through conflicts with their peers and teachers in a constructive way. Under the best circumstances, teachers and other staff teach SEL skills throughout the day, rather than in a distinct program. The following are examples of effective social and emotional learning programs.

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Using a curriculum that teaches several core skills, this program is one of the largest school-based violence prevention programs in the country. The core skills include communicating and listening, cooperating, expressing feelings and dealing with anger, resolving conflicts, appreciating diversity, and countering bias. An evaluation of 5,000 participants in grades 2-6 found significant decreases in hostility and aggression and substantial advances in prosocial behavior. Students' scores in reading and math on standardized tests also increased dramatically.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Curriculum. A comprehensive prevention program for elementary students in kindergarten through 5th grade, PATHS is designed to improve social, emotional, and academic abilities. Regular classroom instructors teach PATHS with initial support from project staff. Detailed lessons, taught throughout the course of each academic year, focus on essential developmental skills in emotional literacy, positive peer relations, and problem solving. Parents are also involved in reinforcing the lessons that children are learning in school. Four studies - two involving regular classroom students and two involving special needs students - have shown an increase in social and emotional competencies, a decrease in aggression and depression, and an improvement in cognitive abilities related to school success.

Check & Connect. Implemented with elementary, middle, and high school students who have attendance problems and are at risk of educational failure, this program utilizes mentors who work with students and parents over an extended period of time. The mentors regularly check on students' educational progress and intervene as appropriate to maintain students' commitment to school and learning. Mentors do not replace established relationships in children's lives but collaborate with other adults in supporting students' educational success. Several studies have shown significantly improved attendance and graduation rates among Check & Connect students.

Guidelines for Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programming

Effective programming for social and emotional learning:

- 1) Grounded in theory and research.** It is based on sound theories of child development, incorporating approaches that demonstrate beneficial effects on children's attitudes and behavior through scientific research.
- 2) Teaches children to apply SEL skills and ethical values in daily life.** Through systematic instruction and application of learning to everyday situations, it enhances children's social, emotional and ethical behavior. Children learn to recognize and manage their emotions., appreciate the perspective of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively. They also develop responsible and respectful attitudes and values about self, others, work, health, and citizenship.
- 3) Builds connection to school through caring, engaging classroom and school practices.** It uses diverse teaching methods to engage students in creating a classroom atmosphere where caring, responsibility, and a commitment to learning thrive. It nurtures students' sense of emotional security and safety, and it strengthens relationships among students, teachers, other school personnel, and families.
- 4) Provides developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction.** It offers developmentally appropriate classroom instruction, including clearly specified learning objectives, for each grade level from preschool through high school. It also emphasizes cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity.
- 5) Helps schools coordinate and unify programs that are often fragmented.** It offers schools a coherent unifying framework to promote the positive social, emotional and academic growth of all students. It coordinates school programs that address positive youth development, problem prevention, health, character, service-learning, and citizenship.
- 6) Enhances school performance by addressing the affective and social dimensions of academic learning.** It teaches students social and emotional competencies that encourage classroom participation, positive interactions with teachers, and good study habits. It introduces engaging teaching and learning methods, such as problem-solving approaches and cooperative learning, that motivate students to learn and to succeed academically.
- 7) Involves families and communities as partners.** It involves school staff, peers, parents, and community members in applying and modeling SEL-related skills and attitudes at school, at home, and in the community.
- 8) Establishes organizational supports and policies that foster success.** It ensures high-quality program implementation by addressing factors that determine the long-term success or failure of school-based programs. These include leadership, active participation on program planning by everyone involved, adequate time and resources and alignment with school, district, and state policies.
- 9) Provides high-quality staff development and support.** It offers well-planned professional development for all school personnel. This includes basic theoretical knowledge, modeling and practice of effective teaching methods, regular coaching, and constructive feedback from colleagues.
- 10) Incorporates continuing evaluation and improvement.** It begins with an assessment of needs to establish a good fit between the school's concerns and SEL programs. It continues gathering data to assess progress, ensure accountability and shape program improvement.

Source: *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs*, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (Chicago, IL), 2003.

4. Character Education

According to the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools of the U.S. Department of Education, schools play a vital role in character education. Here is what schools can do to facilitate character education.

“In school, character education must be approached comprehensively to include the emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities of a person or group. It must offer multiple opportunities for students to learn about, discuss, and enact positive social behaviors. Student leadership and involvement are essential for character education to become a part of a student's beliefs and actions.

“To successfully implement character education, schools are encouraged to:

- take a leadership role to bring the staff, parents, and students together to identify and define the elements of character they want to emphasize
- provide training for staff on how to integrate character education into the life and culture of the school
- form a vital partnership with parents and the community so that students hear a consistent message about the character traits essential for success in school and life
- provide opportunities for school leaders, teachers, parents, and community partners to model exemplary character traits and social behaviors.”

II. Early Intervention

Key elements of early intervention with problem attendance include addressing emerging problems, providing ongoing monitoring and follow-up, connecting students and their families to needed services, and providing alternative ways for students to re-engage in school. Each element and selected related program models are described below.

A. Address Emerging Attendance Problems

Kids can begin missing classes or full days of school for a number of reasons: They are afraid of bullies, they have uncontrolled asthma, they live in chaotic households, they don't get along with a particular teacher, or they are taking care of younger siblings. The list of possible reasons is almost as lengthy as the list of students who begin to cut school. Schools, working with communities, can intervene early in these students' lives to turn around their attendance as well as their overall school experience. But it takes a concerted effort, typically headed by a school-based team that is in close contact with parents and community resources. In most cases, these early interventions do not involve the court system.

Why Students Skip School

What Students Say

... about why they skipped school

- ★ Classes are boring and not relevant.
- ★ Teachers are disrespectful.
- ★ No one seems to care.
- ★ Negative peer influences.
- ★ The environment is uncomfortable.
- ★ They don't know their different educational options.

... about what would make them stay

- ★ More alternatives were available.
- ★ Classes were more hands-on.
- ★ They could get more attention and help from teachers.
- ★ Schedules were flexible.

Source: National Center for School Engagement at the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

Attendance Review Boards

School districts often set up a team, such as a School Attendance Review Board or Team, to intervene early with students who are just beginning to have unexcused absences. School counselors, teachers, or attendance clerks will refer to the board students with a number of unexcused absences and tardies. In the best cases, students will come to the attention of a team after just a few absences. The multidisciplinary team includes parents, school officials, such as nurses, counselors, and teachers as well as community representatives, such as law enforcement and mental health. Once the team receives the referral, they will review the student's record and get in touch with the parent or guardian.

The Cambridge START Program

An example of a successful program is the School Tardiness and Attendance Review Team (START) program, which began in Cambridge, Mass., and has expanded to other towns in the Boston area. The program began in 1998 with funding through the state Executive Office of Public Safety to develop a program to examine and address the issue of truancy. Since then, 10 middle schools have launched the program. Once a student is identified, the assigned school administrator contacts the parent or guardian with a phone call or e-mail message to do the following:

A Successful Program

- Make them aware of the situation
- Remind them of the school's policy and the general laws around attendance
- Express concern
- Introduce the START program to them as a resource

Through this first screening, the team member determines the level of involvement needed from the START team, if any. A parent or guardian may have forgotten to send a note or medical records. But the team member may also discover that a parent needs resources to help get his or her child back to school regularly. Parents are invited to take part in a START team meeting, which gives them the opportunity to explain why their children have been absent. The START team uses that information to make a plan of action, including referrals to school or community-based resources. The team reviews the case in 30 days. If attendance has not improved, the team may make a referral to the Department of Social Services or file a petition in court.

In the 2002-2003 school year, data showed that students who were exposed to the intervention had about a 50 percent decrease in the number of days absent per month and about a 40 percent decrease in the number of times they were tardy each month. Records also indicate that the START program had an impact on the overall climate in the participating schools, with a decrease of approximately 40 percent in the number of children who were chronically absent and 45 percent in the number of children who were chronically tardy (defined as having been absent or late 20 or more times).

B. Provide Ongoing Monitoring and Follow-up

A vulnerable time for many children is their transition years -- from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. Some feel the loss of close contact with the same teacher all day. Others move away from their friends. An increased emphasis on testing puts some struggling students even more behind. The changes in school and environment puts some at risk for truancy and dropping out. For these students, and any at risk of dropping out, ongoing monitoring and follow-up are critical.

Helping Students Make the Transition to Middle School

Moving from elementary to middle school can be one of the most difficult transitions for students. They are used to having the same teacher all day who knows them well, and then they move to an often larger school where they switch classes and teachers several times a day. With such change, it is easy for students to feel lost and disconnected at school.

Kristen Pelster, an assistant principal at Ridgewood Middle School, and her colleague, principal Tim Crutchley, who had recently taken over leadership of the school, started working with sixth-graders a full year before these students entered Ridgewood. They initiated a series of steps to ease transition and help new students feel more connected to the school:

Bringing all incoming sixth-graders to school to sit through the third-hour class and the advisory period.

Holding a “lockin” that all incoming students are invited to. The students spend all night at the school during the lock-in, which features a disc jockey and opportunities to play sports, videos, and other games. Students from the four elementary schools that feed into Ridgewood are all invited. The teaching and other staff come, as well as high school cheerleaders and pom-pom girls, who hold clinics. Community organizations donate food.

Holding a barbeque in May on the football field that again brings students from all four elementary schools together. Students play games and have more opportunities to meet with one another and school staff.

Holding a parent night for all parents of incoming students. During the two and a half-hour meeting, school staff talk to parents about the school and their expectations for the students. Parents also have an opportunity to talk about their needs and expectations.

During the school year, having the principal go to each of the four elementary schools and give each incoming student a copy of the student handbook. The principal reviews school policies, including the dress code and discipline policies.

Holding an orientation for students the summer before school starts.

Having students spend their entire first two days of school with the teachers in their advisory periods. There is no formal teaching. Students and their teachers engage in team-building activities. The time is designed to help students again build a connection to the school.

Components of Promising Truancy Reduction Efforts

Source: OJJDP News at a Glance, Vol. III, No. 1 (January/February 2004)

- Consistent attendance policy and practice, known to all students, parents, staff, and community agencies.
- A continuum of prevention and intervention services, along with incentives and graduated sanctions for students and parents.
- Meaningful parental involvement.
- Special attention to health (e.g., providing onsite responses for asthmatic children, meeting special education needs).
- Data-driven decision making.
- Student attendance review boards.
- Quasi-judicial proceedings.
- Business involvement.
- Focus on school transition years.
- Public awareness campaigns.

C. Connect Kids with Services

Students who are verging on chronic truancy often have many things going on that require outside help. Check and Connect and other programs will provide them with anger management classes, or teen parenting classes, or have them tested for undiagnosed learning disabilities. In Check and Connect, the monitors get to know the students and learn about what excites them. If they like to run or bike, the monitor will connect them with a mentoring program in which they get together with an adult for those activities. The adult also talks to them about the importance of education. The monitors find other community resources for the students as well, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and agencies that meet the needs of minority populations, like students from Cambodia and Somalia.

Check and Connect

A program in Minneapolis is focusing on one of those vulnerable populations -- ninth graders who have just started high school. Check and Connect is a model developed at the University of Minnesota to promote students' engagement with school, reduce dropout, and increase school completion. Students are referred when they show signs of not attending school (absences, tardies, or skipping class) in the context of academic performance and emotional or behavioral problems.

The program began in 1992 focusing on students with disabilities. It has recently begun serving all students in two Minneapolis high schools with the highest dropout rates in the city, averaging around 50 percent. The program specifically focuses on students who attend 89 percent of the time or less (the school district goal is 95 percent). Funded by a private foundation, each school has five monitors to work with students and families. These monitors work to keep students and families engaged and connected with school. A hallmark of the program is that the monitors follow the students for up to two years.

The monitors become intimately involved in the lives of their students. Once they identify students, monitors meet with them and their families. They offer to work with them as a mentor and advocate. In essence, the monitors are part cheerleader, part tough coach. One of their biggest tasks is simply to be a caring adult in the student's life every school day.

Key features of Check and Connect are interrelated and include the following:

Relationship Building: mutual trust and open communication, nurtured through long-term commitment that is focused on students' educational success.

Routine Monitoring of Alterable Indications: systematically checking warning signs of withdrawal (attendance, academic performance, behavior) that are readily available to school personnel and that can be altered through intervention.

Individualized and Timely Intervention: support that is tailored to individual student needs, based on level of engagement with school, associated influences of home and school, and the leveraging of local resources.

Long-Term Commitment: committing to students and families for at least two years, including the ability to follow highly mobile youth from school to school and program to program.

Persistent Plus: refers to a persistent source of academic motivation, a continuity of familiarity with the youth and family, and a consistency in the message that "education is important for your future."

Problem-Solving: designed to promote the acquisition of skills to resolve conflict constructively and to look for solutions rather than a source of blame.

Affiliation with School and Learning: facilitating students' access to and active participation in school-related events and activities.

Source: Check and Connect Web site: <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect>.

D. Provide Alternative Ways for Students to Re-Engage in School

Many of these students do not do well in traditional schools. The approach is too rigid, they are not interested in the school's subjects, or they have just had too much failure or too many problems at that particular school. They don't feel like they fit in. For some of these students, an alternative program or high school may be the answer. These alternatives can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some students might benefit from attending vocational-technical schools where they learn a skill. Other students might do well by earning their GED.

Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia) offers a broad array of alternative school programs including alternative high schools, alternative learning centers, programs for students with behavioral issues, and interagency schools. Examples of these alternative school programs are included in Appendix C.

A Successful Program

Seattle Seahawks School Offers Haven for Students

The Seahawks Academy in Seattle, Wash., is a small alternative school for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders who have been unsuccessful in traditional middle and high schools. The academy is a partnership among Seattle public schools, Communities in Schools (a national nonprofit organization that aims to keep kids in school in part by bringing health and social services into schools), the Seattle Seahawks football team, and corporate partners. The school strives to provide a safe, nurturing, and supportive learning environment for about 110 students and offers smaller class sizes, tutors, mentors, no-cost health care, and social services. Students wear uniforms and must commit to strict behavior contracts signed by the student and parents. The academy emphasizes attendance, academic achievement, and appropriate behavior. Evidence of program effectiveness includes improved test scores, fewer discipline problems, and no suspensions or expulsions for the last two school years compared with suspensions of about seven percent and expulsions of about 0.5 percent at other schools in the district.

Elements of Successful Alternative Schools

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the following are some of the key elements of successful alternative schools:

- A maximum teacher to student ratio of 1:10
- A small student base not exceeding 250 students
- A clearly stated mission and discipline code
- Caring faculty with continual staff development
- A learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style
- A total commitment to have each student be a success.

E. Overcoming Barriers to School Reentry for Juvenile Offenders

Source: *Overcoming Barriers to School Reentry. OJJDP Fact Sheet* (October 2004). Available on-line at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/truncy.pdf>.

For youth leaving custody, a return to school is integral to successful reentry into the community. By building partnerships between the justice and education systems, the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES) has developed a model for overcoming barriers to school reentry.

Data from the New York City Department of Education indicate that more than two-thirds of high school age offenders do not return to school on release. Indeed, the criminal justice and education systems often seem to work at cross purposes. Judges mandate school attendance, but the community lacks an effective system for reenrolling students. The justice system releases young offenders from custody during mid-semesters and summers, when schools are least equipped to admit new students. Many court-involved students perform below grade level and have histories of truancy and suspension. Few, if any, have high school credits. They require a disproportionate rate of special education services and often feel alienated from school. If the special needs of these youth are not met, they are at risk of dropping out of school and returning to the justice system, at considerable social and financial cost.

Through CASES, the Committee on Court Involved-Students, the School Connection Center, and the Community Prep High School are helping court-involved youth continue their education and reenter their communities.

Committee on Court-Involved Students

In 2001, education and criminal justice officials formed the Committee on Court-Involved Students. The committee includes the city's juvenile justice, corrections, and probation departments; city and state child welfare agencies; and staff from the education department's Chancellor's Office and special education, custodial schools, and admissions offices. Committee members work collaboratively to identify barriers to education for students leaving custody and to remove those barriers.

School Connection Center

The School Connection Center is a high school admissions office whose staff of criminal justice and education professionals collaborate to ensure that education reentry goals are met for students discharged from custodial schools to residences in Manhattan. The Center is funded by a Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant. Its services include educational assessments, transfer of academic records, and expedited enrollment in community schools. Of the 507 court-involved students served at the School Connection Center, 394 (78 percent) have been placed in 79 community schools and education programs. Students are tracked for 4 months after school placement, and the attendance rate for these students is 70 percent. Retention of students during the entire school year is 66 percent.

Community Prep High School

Community Prep High School is a transitional school that addresses the academic and social needs of students who are not ready to attend community schools on release from custody. It receives funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Community Prep services include—

- Dual curriculums to build students' academic and social skills.

-
- Rolling admissions for students released by the justice system throughout the school year.
 - Student government and other leadership opportunities.
 - Family involvement.
 - Collaboration between school staff and agencies that monitor criminal justice.
 - Restorative justice practices, such as problem-solving circles, to address disciplinary issues.
 - Literacy activities included in academic and after school curricula.
 - Girls only advisory and extracurricular activities.
 - Saturday classes.
 - Individual counseling and case management services.
 - After school tutoring, recreation, employment skills training, and internships.
 - Enrollment lasting 10–15 months before students are transitioned to traditional community schools, GED or vocational programs, or employment.

Preliminary data indicate that Community Prep students engaged in learning and participated in the school community. Some students with high rates of truancy at their previous community school (before time in custody) demonstrated strong gains, including an average attendance increase of more than 15 percent among students who were at Community Prep for at least 45 days in the fall 2003 semester and who had attendance rates of 55 percent or lower at their prior community school.

In conclusion, partnerships between the justice and education systems are essential for juvenile reentry. Such partnerships must remedy two critical gaps: delayed access to community schools and a shortage of appropriate schools for young people leaving custody. The School Connection Center and Community Prep High School are models for expediting admissions and improving academic and social skills among court-involved youth. Community agencies such as CASES can play an important role in brokering partnerships between the education and justice systems and in promoting positive outcomes for court-involved youth.

Related Reading:

Overcoming Barriers to School Reentry by Cora Roy-Stevens. *OJJDP Fact Sheet* (October 2004).
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, DC.
Available on-line at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/truncy.pdf>.

F. Truancy Assessment Centers

Source: The Community Assessment Center Concept (March 2000). *The Community Assessment Center Concept*, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (March 2000). Available on-line at: http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_03_6/contents.html

Communities across the country are searching for more effective and efficient methods to identify and intervene with juveniles at risk of becoming tomorrow's serious, violent, and chronic offenders. There is a recognition not only that the juvenile justice system could better serve youth and families, but also that the system has many inefficiencies. Finding a solution to these systemic problems is difficult and complicated because serious violence and delinquency are often the result of more than one risk factor. Youth with problems are often involved in several different systems (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment) that may not adequately communicate with one another. The

Community Assessment Center (CAC) concept addresses these problems by bringing together fragmented service delivery systems in a collaborative, timely, cost-efficient, and comprehensive manner.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's CAC model has four key elements that, when implemented properly, have the potential to positively impact the lives of youth and divert them from the path of serious, violent, and chronic delinquency:

- **Single point of entry.** CAC's provide a 24-hour centralized point of intake and assessment for juveniles who have come or are likely to come into contact with the juvenile justice system.
- **Immediate and comprehensive assessments.** Juvenile justice practitioners and community-based youth service providers affiliated with the CAC make initial broad-based and, if necessary later, more indepth assessments of juveniles' circumstances and treatment needs.
- **Management information system (MIS).** Through the use of an MIS, CAC's manage and monitor youth, ensuring the provision of appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services and avoiding duplication of services.
- **Integrated case management.** CAC staff use information from the assessment process and MIS to develop recommendations, facilitate access to services, conduct followups, and periodically reassess youth.

Truancy Assessment Centers are aimed at identifying and removing barriers to school attendance. In addition to assessment services, such centers may provide direct services including parent education and support, individual and group counseling, and referral to other needed community services.

Related Reading:

The Community Assessment Center Concept by Debra Oldenettel and Madeline Wordesy.
Juvenile Justice Bulletin (March 2000). Available on-line at:
http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_03_6/contents.html

III. Legal Intervention: Tackling Some of the Hardest Cases

A. Judicially-Driven Truancy Intervention

Courts have traditionally been the last resort for truant students. Judges see the kids with the worst attendance records and the most complicated problems. They can order children to go back to school or send them to juvenile detention; however, neither option addresses the underlying issues or often seems to make much of a difference.

In recent years judges and courts have begun taking a more activist role. Armed with the power of the bench, judges are reaching out to the community and schools to bring together a combination of judicial threat and support to help truant students and their families get back on track. Judges are reaching out to students and their parents before truancy becomes chronic. In some cases, they hold truancy court at schools. In others, courts have set up alternatives to court, such as community truancy boards and attendance workshops. All these approaches are aimed at learning about the underlying reasons for truancy, making a plan to address those issues, and holding the authority of the court as an incentive for parents and children to get back on track.

The Truancy Court Diversion Program

In Louisville, Ky., Family Court Judge Joan Byer can attest to the frustration of working on truancy cases that come before her. Judge Byer and Linda Wilhems, the liaison from Louisville schools to the courts, decided to set up a program to address the root causes of the reasons why children stop attending school. Modeled after Drug Courts, the judge and a multidisciplinary team from the school and community meet weekly with children and parents for ten to 12 weeks. Unlike Drug Courts, however, these courts meet in the student's school. Byer and her team target “soft truants” -- those children who have missed 20 days in a semester. They look for a family who is willing to attend truancy court every week for at least ten weeks and who is not involved in other judicial matters, such as child protective services or juvenile detention. Participating families have not tapped into community resources that could help them, but they are willing to make changes.

Quick Look:

The Truancy Court Diversion Program in Louisville, Ky., is an intervention program created to address the root causes of truancy. The program, led by Judge Joan Byer, holds 10 to 12 weekly court sessions at a school for students who have been truant. A case manager works with the family to set up support systems to help the child get to school and stay there.

The program is not designed for the hardest cases of truancy -- children who are absent for more than 30 days and whose parents are having so many problems that they cannot support the child by attending weekly sessions. Those truants need much deeper and long-lasting help that a ten-week program cannot address. This program is designed for children who are in danger of dropping out but can still catch up.

The team includes Judge Byer, a family advocate who is a seasoned social worker and is familiar with services in the community, the local school attendance clerk, a school counselor,

and a teacher. Once a family is identified, a social worker and school representative visit the family's home to tell them about the program and to assess their needs. They might learn about mental health issues, substance abuse, medical problems such as asthma, and recent losses, such as the death of a family member, or a divorce. From that information, if the family agrees to participate, then the team can begin to make a plan to address those needs.

The team is hands-on. If a family is reluctant to make the first call for mental health counseling, a social worker will make the call. If a mother says she doesn't have a car to bring her daughter to a chemical dependency appointment, someone from the team will give her a ride. Some of the parents cannot read and team members have helped them enroll in classes that will eventually allow them to earn their GED.

The Truancy Court Diversion Program began in a middle school within walking distance of Judge Byer's courtroom. In the truancy courts, which take place at 8 a.m. once a week in school, Judge Byer reviews the child's file and then talks to the child and parent about the progress they are making. With the power of the judiciary behind her, Byer said she can make sure families get the services they need, such as alcohol treatment or housing assistance, sooner rather than later. School liaisons can set up a tutoring program to help students catch up and enroll them in after-school programs to help engage them in school again.

In addition to the weekly court sessions, team members visit the families' homes once a week and make sure they are getting needed services. Students receive small rewards, such as books and calculators, which are given out every week. The program takes students to a local book store to browse and pick out books they want to read, and sponsors a field trip to a state park for students and families just to have some fun. Staff also invite family members to an open house at school for a meal, to listen to music, and to have a positive overall experience.

Byer points out that the program can reach a small number of students. Out of 96,000 students in the Louisville school system, about 14,000 are truant each year. Of those, about 250 will attend the truancy program. Once the ten-week program ends, team members will follow up with students and their families to make sure their attendance continues.

Related Reading:

Truancy, Literacy and the Courts: A User's Manual for Setting up a Truancy Intervention Program (2001). American Bar Association. See: http://www.abanet.org/subabuse/truancy_brochure.pdf

Community Truancy Board

The King County Superior Court in Seattle, Washington began to develop alternatives to court appearances after the court was overwhelmed with the number of truancy petitions being filed. Now when a truancy petition is filed, families have the option of attending an evening workshop, participating in a community truancy board hearing, or proceeding to court on the charges.

The workshop, which the student and a parent attend, includes education about truancy laws and facilitates planning between the parent and youth to address the cause of truancy. Community truancy boards composed of local community members hear the case, develop a plan with the student and family, and monitor compliance with the agreement.

Quick Look:

The King County Superior Court truancy reduction project consists of a multitiered approach to families involved in the truancy petition process of the Juvenile Court. It includes the following: Attendance workshops are offered as an alternative to the formal court process. The two and one-half hour workshop includes rights and responsibilities for schools, Washington state truancy law, a small-group discussion about intervention efforts, and contract development by the parent and youth. Students may be ordered to appear in court if their attendance does not improve. Case managers may be assigned to work with families to identify and access community- and school-based programs. This is one of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Truancy Demonstration programs.

The alternatives to truancy petitions focus on the carrot-and-stick approach: Kids need to experience success so they can become re-engaged with school, and kids and their parents need to be held accountable for their actions. If they do not follow through on their plans for improvement, the truancy petition can still be filed.

The community truancy board is composed of people from the area, all of whom are parents, and is designed to be a non-threatening, non-confrontational approach to parents who may be feeling protective of their child and hostile toward school officials. At the end of the attendance workshop and community truancy board, students are asked to make a contract for what they can do to improve their attendance. Parents are asked to make a contract for what they can do to help their child in her plan. In many cases, schools are asked to help as well. That might mean transferring a student from a classroom of a teacher he does not get along with or allowing him to take an independent study. Students and parents receive follow-up attention from both the attendance workshop coordinators and community board members to make sure they stay on track.

Some students and family need more help than just an attendance workshop or community truancy board can provide. To address those needs, the King County courts hired four full-time case managers to help children and their families and schools link to community services. Then some families need yet more help. The kids said that they were going to leave home and the parents were showing them the door. Simply lining up after-school programs or tutoring was not going to do the job. The courts started offering “functional family therapy,” in which youth and their families learn how to communicate better with one another.

When schools look beyond their walls to help serve their student population, and community agencies and institutions open up their doors to help local youth, all students and their families will benefit -- particularly those with the greatest needs.

Barbara Kennedy runs a community truancy board for the Tahoma School District, a suburb of Seattle with about 6,000 students. She gets referrals for kids who have missed three to ten or more days of school without an excuse. After researching a case, Kennedy sends a letter to the parents about the law and consequences of truancy for the child. She refers many of these cases to the community board.

She finds that 85 percent of the students who participate in the community truancy boards return to and stay in school. The court rate is between 35 and 45 percent, she said. Overall, 78 percent of the 3,000 youth who participated in the attendance workshop avoided formal court intervention for truancy and 58 percent avoided juvenile justice involvement of any kind in the 18 months following their participation.

Steps for Establishing a Community Truancy Board

Source: Dimock, K. *King County Superior Court Community Truancy Board Development Handbook, 2002-2004*. Seattle, WA: King County Superior Court.

I. School District Commitment

- A. Discussion between truancy coordinators and administration about level of interest and commitment including additional staff time or reassigned staff time and authority to proceed.
- B. Discussion about how district will use community truancy board: as an intervention, as an alternative to court, or both.
- C. Consensus about who will take the lead on community truancy board development.

II. Volunteer Recruitment

- A. Develop application format.
- B. Place public service announcements in newspapers,
- C. Mail invitations to volunteer to mailing lists of Kiwanis, nonprofits in the area, Better Business Bureau, Parent-Teachers Association, etc.
- D. Interview and screen volunteers.

III. Volunteer Training

- A. Develop training materials to include information about truancy in general, rationale of community truancy boards, authority of community truancy board granted by statute and by district, use of stipulated orders, examples of appropriate recommendations, local resources list(s), and procedures.
- B. Provide three evenings of training.
- C. Develop forms and secure volunteer signatures for volunteer liability and hold harmless statements.
- D. Develop forms and secure volunteer signature and commitment for volunteer code of conduct and confidentiality agreement.
- E. Gather volunteer availability schedules and assign volunteers into teams that will meet regularly but not more than twice a month.
- F. Decide whether student volunteers will be included.

IV. Establishment of a Referral Process

- A. Who will decide which cases go to the community truancy board.
- B. How case information will get to the community truancy board.
- C. Develop referral materials to include synopsis of interventions to date.

V. Community Truancy Board Operations and Coordination

- A. How paperwork will flow.
- B. How the board will monitor compliance.
- C. How the district will know in case of noncompliance.
- D. How the board will hear updates on cases already heard.
- E. Who will schedule community truancy board hearings.

VI. Evaluative Component

- A. Develop survey instrument to measure parent satisfaction with community truancy board process.
- B. Develop survey instrument to measure student satisfaction with community truancy board process.
- C. Develop way to measure volunteer satisfaction to ensure retention.

VII. Volunteer Appreciation

- A. Identify ways to recognize exemplary work.
- B. Create year-end recognition for all.

VIII Public Relations Component

- A. Invite district administrators and leaders to observe community truancy board and meet volunteers.
- B. Encourage local press articles about process and success of community truancy board.
- C. Use information gathered from evaluations to plug community truancy board to district, local leaders, press and potential funders.
- D. Keep track of numbers of cases, level of compliance, attitude/behavior change of student, and percentage decrease in use of court.

Truancy Mediation

Truancy mediation programs are a fairly recent way to combat truancy problems. While courts run some programs, they often refer juveniles to programs administered by teen courts, mediation centers, or prosecutors' offices. Such programs are often a partnership between several entities that deal with juveniles in various contexts, including schools, social service agencies, probation, attorneys general, juvenile courts, teen courts, and others. Many peer or youth mediation programs include truancy components or were started in part to address truancy issues. For additional information on truancy mediation in Virginia, contact the Supreme Court of Virginia, Department of Dispute Resolution Services, at (804) 786-6455 or <http://www.courts.state.va.us/drs/main.htm/>

B. Youth Courts and Truancy

Source: Selected Topics on Youth Courts: A Monograph. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. May 2004. Available online at: <http://www.youthcourt.net/publications/monograph.pdf>

Background

Youth court programs exist in many different settings. Some programs operate out of probation offices or police departments (i.e., juvenile justice system-based). Some are located in organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs (i.e., communitybased), and some programs are operated out of middle and high schools (i.e., schoolbased). Regardless of where the program is located, all youth courts have a common goal—to hold youthful offenders accountable for their actions by giving them a disposition determined by their peers.

Most of the available youth court program literature focuses more on juvenile justice system-based and community-based youth court programs. As of March 2004, only seven percent of the 930 youth court programs listed in the National Youth Court Center's database were identified as school-based programs. Because of this relatively low number, there is not much specific research or programmatic information about how school-based youth court programs operate.

Overview of Youth Court Programs

Youth courts (also known as teen courts, peer courts, peer juries, and student courts) are youth-driven programs in which young people sentence their peers for minor delinquent and status offenses or problem behavior. The primary function of most youth court programs is to determine a fair, appropriate, and restorative disposition (i.e., sentence) for respondents, and most youth court programs require the respondent to admit guilt before he or she is eligible for youth court. Therefore, the vast majority of a youth court program's main function is to determine an appropriate disposition for the young person, not determine guilt or innocence. Although a small percentage (approximately eight percent) of youth courts in the United States will allow youth to plead guilty or not guilty, the NYCC is not aware of any school-based youth courts that function in this manner.

Most youth courts accept first time, misdemeanor, or status offenses such as shoplifting, vandalism, possession of alcohol, or smoking. The most commonly used dispositional options that youth courts use include community service, oral or written apologies, jury duty, essays, and educational workshops.

The manner in which youth court programs conduct hearings or trials varies among programs. Currently, there are four primary youth court program models that youth courts utilize—the Adult

Judge Model, the Youth Judge Model, the Youth Tribunal Model, and the Peer Jury Model. Some programs choose to develop their own unique models that may include elements from one or more of the four models mentioned. Other programs may choose to utilize more than one program model (e.g., Adult Judge and Peer Jury) and switch between them depending on what type of case is being presented or how many youth volunteers are available to participate in the hearing.

School-Based Youth Court Programs

School-based youth court programs are youth courts that are administered or operated by schools and that primarily handle school disciplinary cases, although some also accept referrals for delinquency and status offenses from justice system entities (e.g., juvenile court, juvenile probation, law enforcement). Many middle and high schools are increasingly recognizing how youth court can be used to handle school-related offenses that otherwise would be addressed by an alternative disciplinary action (e.g., detention, suspension, referrals to a hearing officer).

Youth court programs are very appropriate for schools and can benefit the administration, the teachers, the students, and the community. Administrators appreciate youth court programs because they decrease the number of youth who are taken out of school due to detention or suspension. Many times suspending a student for a minor offense does not correct the student's behavior. In actuality, the student may want to be suspended because he or she may view the suspension as a holiday.

Youth courts provide schools with an opportunity for students to be held accountable for their negative behavior without losing valuable learning time. Teachers also appreciate the quick response that youth courts can provide when youth are acting out in their classes. In addition, teachers like youth court because it helps educate youth about our legal system and problem behaviors, encourages civic responsibility, and engages students in service-learning. By nature, youth courts facilitate youth empowerment and enhance decision-making skills of youth volunteers involved with the program. Additionally, youth respondents are held accountable through a disposition determined by their peers. Youth courts can also link students to services to assist them with their schoolwork (e.g., tutoring) and help them become more connected to their schools in positive ways.

While most school-based youth courts focus their attention on school disciplinary cases or minor infractions that occur on school property, there are some school-based youth courts that have agreements or partnerships with the local juvenile justice system in which the youth courts will accept direct referrals for delinquency cases such as shoplifting or trespassing. This is especially helpful in communities where there is not another youth court in place to address these types of issues. Likewise, more community- and juvenile justice system-based youth courts are developing partnerships with schools and are accepting referrals from school administrators for school disciplinary problems.

Truancy and Youth Courts

As of May 2004, there were more than 940 active youth courts in the United States. In a growing number of these jurisdictions, youth court is being considered as an alternative response for handling truancy cases. Youth courts can be administered by and operated within a variety of agencies within a community including law enforcement agencies, juvenile probation departments, juvenile courts, private nonprofit agencies, and schools. As of May 2004, approximately 27% of youth courts reported that they accept referrals for truancy. However, many youth courts struggle with how to structure their youth court and design services to meet the needs of truant youth more effectively. This section identifies some advantages and challenges to addressing truancy cases in youth courts and offers some strategies for responding to truancy referrals more effectively.

Advantages of Using Youth Court for Truancy Cases

There are a number of benefits that youth courts provide to youth, families, schools, the juvenile justice system, and the community.

Benefits to Youth

Youth courts hold truants accountable for their behavior through positive peer pressure and challenge them to accept responsibility for their actions. Through meaningful and constructive dispositions, youth courts also are able to connect young people to appropriate services within their communities to help them address issues that may be contributing to their truant behavior (e.g., tutoring services for youth who are behind in school, individual or family counseling for youth who have personal or family issues that are causing their behavior). Youth courts also help teach young people life skills that can help them become more responsible and productive citizens. In addition, youth courts can connect young people to mentors and other positive youth and adult role models who can serve as a support system for them and their families.

Benefits to Schools

Youth courts offer schools (especially middle and high schools) a proven model for effectively intervening with and addressing delinquent and other problem behaviors. Due to large juvenile court dockets, often youth courts offer schools a system of graduated sanctions and a more timely response for addressing truancy than the regular juvenile court process would be able to provide. The decisionmaking process for attendance problems and their consequences is also transferred to the youth's peers, relieving the school administrators from being the only source of sanctions.

Schools benefit when youth are present and learning. Since schools' funding is based on average daily attendance, schools can benefit by having an alternative such as youth courts, which can re-connect youth to a daily school experience. More important, when youth are in school and learning, achievement and test scores increase, and youth have a better chance at finishing school and becoming productive citizens. Youth court also offers teachers and administrators, who are often frustrated by their truant students' behavior, much needed support services (e.g., swift consequences at the onset of attendance problems).

Benefits to the Juvenile Justice System

Juvenile and family courts have burgeoning caseloads and need alternatives for addressing cases such as truancy so that they can focus on more serious, violent, and chronic offenders. Often when youth are petitioned to court for truancy, there is a wait of weeks or even months before a hearing takes place. During this time, the truant behavior may continue, and even result in suspension, making it even more difficult to reengage the young person in school. Youth courts offer the system a means for addressing truancy soon after it occurs, therefore increasing the chance of stopping further truant behavior before it spirals out of control.

Benefits to Families

Youth courts can provide a parent, guardian, or other family members needed backup and reinforcement on the importance of staying in school by offering a swift response and immediate consequences when their child begins to miss or stop going to school. These programs also offer families of truant and non-truant youth (as respondents or volunteers) a service-learning opportunity for their children to be involved in during or after school hours. Youth courts can help educate parents and other family members on compulsory education laws and school policies and procedures. In addition, through youth courts families can receive appropriate support services to help them and their truant children address issues that contribute to truancy.

Benefits to the Community

There are economic benefits as well that result in savings to taxpayers and the community when truant behavior is addressed in youth court before it becomes chronic or habitual. For example, when a truancy reduction program intervened in Tacoma, Washington, by conducting local sweeps to find youth out of school, a link between daytime juvenile crime and truancy quickly was recognized. Tacoma police reported that the juvenile daytime crime rate decreased by 65% as a result of the truancy sweeps. Therefore, communities benefit by having an intervention such as youth court because it helps keep youth in schools and off of the streets during school hours and reduces daytime juvenile crime.

Related Reading:

Selected Topics on Youth Courts: A Monograph. May 2004. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available online at: <http://www.youthcourt.net/publications/monograph.pdf>

C. Examples of Virginia School-Court Partnerships

Source: Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court

Alternative Schools are co-sponsored by the court and the Fairfax County Public Schools for court-involved youngsters who are unable to benefit from the ordinary public school experience. Each of the court's four residential programs and four probation services offices have alternative school programs, as well as its juvenile intake unit. Each school has approximately twelve students per class. Students receive individualized remedial instruction designed to enable them, sometimes within a year, to either return to a regular school, obtain a high school equivalency diploma, or enroll in a vocational or work-study program.

The private, non-profit **Enterprise School** provides a therapeutic learning environment for up to 25 juveniles of average and above-average intelligence whose emotional and behavioral problems have prevented them from coping effectively in regular public schools. Students are enrolled in a six-credit academic program and must attend weekly group counseling with other students. They and their parents are required to participate in bi-weekly group family counseling.

The **Independent Study Alternative School** is designed to address the educational needs of youths who have been unable to benefit from either traditional classroom instruction or other alternative school programs. Youth enrolled in this program meet with teachers twice a week for evaluative sessions and are required to be employed a minimum of 20 hours a week. A probation or parole referral is required.

School Probation Officer Program

Jointly sponsored by the Court and the Fairfax County Public Schools, teachers in high schools are designated as part-time probation counselors. They work to handle student problems through counseling and referral either before or after the students become involved with the Court. Court probation officers work closely with school staff to assist them in supervision of youth placed on probation. The residents with individually tailored instruction. Most residents are able to view themselves as successful students — often for the first time in their school history. An educational day program offers program graduates the opportunity to complete a semester or school year before returning to their base school.

Chapter Three

Community Approaches in Virginia

I. Virginia's Legal Framework

A. An Interagency Perspective on Truancy

Virginia law sets forth responsibilities of schools and of Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts in relation to children who do not attend school regularly or otherwise comply with compulsory school attendance requirements. In the case of children whose families receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), local departments of social services are required by law to take certain prescribed actions. In some cases, a school division, a juvenile court, and a local department of social services may be involved with the same child. Each system – education, justice, and social services – must act in accordance with responsibilities set forth in applicable laws and regulations.

Truancy-Related Terminology

The terminology used in referring to children and youth who do not attend school regularly reflects the perspectives of different community agencies serving families and children.

- Schools typically call them “truants.”
- Courts and law enforcement agencies call them “status offenders” because their behavior is an “offense” only because they have the “status” of being minor children.
- Once children reach Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court they are called “children in need of supervision” (CHINSup).
- An attorney refers to the child as the “defendant.”
- The local department of social services refers to the child as a “member of an assistance unit” if the parents are receiving financial assistance.
- The truant child may also be referred to as a “student,” a “minor,” a “child” or a “juvenile” depending on the applicable law or regulation.

The differences in terminology reflect differences in relationships that local agencies – and broader systems – have with a child who does not attend school regularly. Regardless of terminology, all systems share the goal of regular school attendance. The challenge for localities is how these different systems can most effectively orchestrate their activities to achieve their common goal.

Overview of Key Agency Functions

Specific legal requirements and procedures to meet the requirements are detailed later in this chapter. A general description of key interagency functions related to school attendance provides an introductory overview. Four key interagency functions have been identified.

1. Establishing expectations for school attendance and responses to non-compliance.

The *Code of Virginia* has a number of provisions to establish the expectations for parents, for children, for schools, and for courts in regard to school attendance. Expectations for schools are most thoroughly set forth in Title 22 of the *Code* that defines who must attend school and who is exempt, requires schools to send copies of the compulsory attendance law to all parents of enrolled students, assigns responsibilities for keeping accurate daily records of attendance, and establishes the duties of school attendance officers. Title 22 of the *Code* sets forth parental responsibility and involvement requirements in relation to student conduct and attendance.

Also established in law are expectations for juvenile courts in response to noncompliance with the compulsory attendance law. Defined in Title 16 of the *Code* are the authority of juvenile courts, duties of probation officers, processes for filing petitions, procedures governing court hearings, and dispositions available to the courts in such cases. For children receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) the expectation for school attendance is also established in law in Title 63 of the *Code*.

Included in Appendix C is information about Keeping Kids in School (KKIS) in Newport News, Virginia, an example of a campaign designed to build community norms supporting regular school attendance.

2. Identifying those students who are not attending school.

Primary responsibility for identifying students who are not attending school rests with schools. Title 22 of the *Code* requires the maintenance of daily records of attendance. It also requires the appointment of attendance officers whose duties include investigating cases of non-enrollment and, when necessary, taking action against parents and non-attending students. School principals are required by law to hold conferences to address non-attendance and to report the numbers of students requiring such a conference. Title 22 of the *Code* also authorizes law enforcement officers and attendance officers to pick up children who are truant and deliver them to school or truancy centers. Finally, schools are required to report the nonattendance of children receiving TANF to local departments of social services (Title 63).

3. Providing services to achieve and maintain school attendance.

Providing services to achieve and maintain school attendance is an extremely complex and critical function. In providing such services, schools and community agencies share responsibility for addressing and resolving the underlying causes of school absences. While schools retain responsibility for providing educational services, including alternative and individualized programs, an expectation for involvement of other service providers is clearly

set forth in the *Code*. The involvement of community services boards, departments of social services, and other appropriate public and private agencies, including the community’s family assessment and planning team (FAPT) may occur prior to court involvement, as a part of a truancy plan initiated by a court service unit intake officer, or in compliance with court orders.

Schools, courts, and other community agencies must determine, at the local level, specifically how services to achieve and maintain school attendance will be provided.

At the interagency *systems level*, respective roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined. A structure for interagency collaboration must be established and procedures and protocols for the referral of students and parents must be developed.

At the *case level*, substantial resources must be devoted to case management to ensure that underlying causes of nonattendance are adequately assessed, effective interventions with both the child and parent are identified and mobilized, progress is monitored, and interventions are refined in response to results. Services must be timely and well-documented if legal remedies are to be pursued. Included in Appendix C is information about several educational alternatives being offered, several involving school-court collaboration in Fairfax County, Virginia.

4. Levying sanctions against those responsible for school non-attendance.

School boards may proceed against either the child or the parent if a child continues not to attend school. Case-specific factors determine the appropriate course(s) of action taken.

At the *systems level*, local school and court expectations and specific intake procedures should be well-defined to help ensure proper handling of complaints and to increase the likelihood of desirable outcomes.

At the *case level*, the court may order a broad range of actions and penalties, depending on the nature of the complaint and case-specific factors. A substantial level of case management will continue to be required to monitor compliance with orders of the court.

If the child has not previously been proceeded against, the intake officer may defer filing a complaint for 90 days to develop a truancy plan using an “interagency interdisciplinary team approach.” If results are positive, judicial involvement may not be necessary; if results are not positive, a complaint is filed and heard by the judge. Upon a finding that the child is in need of supervision, the judge has an array of dispositional options

B. Legal Requirements for School Attendance

Note: Information on Virginia’s legal framework is adapted from a document originally prepared by the Virginia Commission on Youth.

§22.1-254 Compulsory School Attendance

This section of the *Code of Virginia* defines who is required to attend school and who is exempt. It is important to note that the emphasis and responsibility for compliance is placed with the parents and applies to all forms of schooling.

Code Contents

- ★ Every parent who has a child between the ages of five and eighteen shall send him to school.
- ★ The term ‘school’ encompasses traditional or alternative programs of study offered by public, private, parochial, denominational schools and instruction by tutors and home schooling.
- ★ The provisions apply to:
 - Children under the custody of either the Department of Juvenile Justice or Corrections who have not reached their eighteenth birthday.
 - Children whom the division superintendent has requested to take special programming.
- ★ The provisions do not apply to:
 - Children who have obtained a high school diploma, GED, certificate of completion or have otherwise complied with attendance requirements.
 - Persons 16 to 18 years of age who are housed in adult correctional facilities and are actively pursuing a GED.
- ★ Local school boards shall excuse from school attendance:
 - Any child with parental support, who for ‘bona fide’ religious reasons opposes school attendance.
 - Any child, upon the recommendation of the Juvenile Court, for a period of time deemed appropriate, in response to medical or personal safety concerns.
- ★ Local school boards may excuse from school attendance:
 - Any child upon recommendation of the principal, superintendent, with written parental consent.
 - Any child upon recommendation of the Juvenile Court.
- ★ Local school boards may grant a waiver from school attendance:
 - Any child who is at least sixteen years of age.
 - Child, parent and principal agree to a mandatory attendance in GED preparatory program or alternative education program.
- ★ Local school boards may allow requirements for compulsory attendance to be met under the following conditions:
 - For a student at least 16 years of age, an individual student alternative education plan shall be developed and must include career guidance counseling, enrollment in GED or other alternative education program, counseling on economic impact of failing to complete high school and procedures for reenrollment.

§22.1-279.3 Parental Responsibility and Involvement Requirement

This section of the *Code of Virginia* is somewhat unusual as it focuses specifically on the Commonwealth’s expectations for parental support in their child’s education process. Parental involvement in the educational process is listed as a duty. The concept of a partnership between parents and the school system is introduced here and is referenced through the statutes dealing with truancy.

Code Contents

- ★ Each parent has a duty to assist the schools in enforcing the standards of student conduct and attendance.
- ★ If the court finds a parent willfully and unreasonably fails in fulfill responsibilities set forth, the court may order the student, his parent, or both, to participate in treatment including, but not limited to, extended day programs, summer school, other educational programs and counseling and may require the parent to pay for services to the extent the parent is able.

§16.1-228 Definitions

This section of the *Code* establishes all the definitions of terms used throughout Title 16 of the *Code* that pertain to the operations and provisions of the Juvenile Court. Specifically, this section defines a truant from a court processes perspective. If a petition is filed for a truant, it will be classified as a CHINSup (Child in Need of Supervision). The definition encompasses both the behavior of the student and that of the school system. The definition of a CHINS (Child in Need of Services) has been included as many of the conditions which lead to truancy are evidenced in that definition.

Code Contents

Child in Need of Services (CHINS) means a child whose behavior, conduct or condition presents or will result in a serious threat to the well-being of the child.

- ★ The conduct complained of must:
 - Present a clear and substantial danger to the child's life or health, or
 - The family is in need of services not presently received, or
 - The intervention of the court is essential for those services to be received.
- ★ Exemptions to this definition include children who run away from home as a result of what is determined by the court of child protective services to be conditions of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

A Child in Need of Supervision (CHINSup) means a child who is subject to the compulsory attendance law yet remains habitually absent, and:

- The child has been offered adequate opportunity to benefit from all education services that are required to be provided by law.
- The school or other appropriate agency has made a reasonable effort to effect the student's attendance without success.
- The school system has provided the court with documentation that it has complied with all the provisions of §22.1-258, *Code of Virginia*.

C. Schools: Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law

§22.1-259 Teachers to Keep Daily Attendance Records

This section of the *Code* addresses the expectations of teachers to keep daily records of attendance and lists of those who are authorized to access the records.

Code Contents

- ★ Every teacher in every school is to keep an accurate daily record of attendance.
- ★ The records shall be open to any authorized officer for inspection, available for reproduction and submission into evidence.

§22.1-258 Appointment of Attendance Officer: Notification When Pupil Fails to Report to School

This section of the *Code* is probably the backbone of all the truancy statutes. It addresses the responsibilities of the student, parent, and school employees with respect to attendance, identification procedures and the provision of services as well as the imposition of sanctions in the event of continued noncompliance. The primary element of this section with respect to identification is that an

“unexcused absence” is defined as one in which the parents are unaware and non-supportive of their child’s nonattendance.

Code Contents

- ★ Every school board has the power to appoint an attendance officer; in cases when no officer has been appointed, the division superintendent shall act as the attendance officer.
- ★ If a pupil fails to report on a regular school day and the school has no indication that the pupil’s parent is aware of and supports the absence, school personnel shall make a reasonable effort to notify the parent by telephone to obtain an explanation for the pupil’s absence.
- ★ Whenever a pupil fails to report to school for a total of five scheduled school days, school personnel shall make reasonable effort to ensure direct contact either in person or through telephone contact. The parent, pupil, and attendance officer shall jointly develop a plan to resolve the pupil’s nonattendance.
- ★ If the pupil is absent an additional day after direct contact with the parent, a conference shall be scheduled within 10 days and held no later than 15 school days after the sixth absence. The conference may include other community service providers to resolve issues related to the pupil’s nonattendance.
- ★ School personnel are immune from civil or criminal liability in connection with notice to parents.
- ★ Upon the next absence after the conference, the school principal or designee shall notify the attendance officer to enforce the law through filing a CHINS petition or proceeding against the parent.

§22.1-260 Reports of Children Enrolled and Non-enrolled

This section of the *Code* primarily addresses the compilation of a list by each school principal of the names of each student enrolled in the school and that of his parents. This list forms the basis upon which average daily membership is calculated. The section also requires reporting by the principal to the division superintendent of the number of pupils for whom a conference needed to be scheduled to address nonattendance issues pursuant to §22.1-258. This amendment to the *Code* was added as a means to develop a statewide count of cases of truancy.

Code Contents

- ★ Within ten days of the start of the school year, the principal is to submit to the division superintendent a list with the name, age and grades of each student and the names and addresses of their parents.
- ★ The principal will submit, to the best of his or her knowledge, a list of the names of students and their parents who should be enrolled but are not.
- ★ At the end of the school year the principal will provide a list to the superintendent of the names, ages, and grades of those students for whom a conference was scheduled to address nonattendance issues pursuant to §22.1-258.

§22.1-261 Duties of the Attendance Officer

Most of this section of the *Code* deals with the role of the attendance officer to identify those students who are not appropriately enrolled in school and to notify the parents to require their child’s attendance. While it does not deal specifically with truancy, it does underscore the important the *Code* places on school enrollment and attendance. Other truancy-related duties of the attendance officer are set forth in §22.1-258.

Code Contents

- ★ It is the duty of the attendance officer to investigate all cases of non-enrollment and when no valid reason is identified, to notify the parent to require school attendance.

§22.1-262 Complaint to the Court When Parent Fails to Comply With the Law

This section of the *Code* lists the types of parental behaviors for which the schools can petition the court. The majority of these behaviors are acts of omission (i.e., failure to participate) as opposed to acts of commission typically addressed by criminal laws.

Code Contents

- ★ A list of parents who have been notified for failure to enroll their children is sent to the school principal.
- ★ A complaint against the parents shall be filed in the juvenile court by the schools for:
 - Not enrolling their children within the time frame specified.
 - Failing to comply with compulsory attendance laws.
 - Refusing to participate in development of a plan to resolve nonattendance.
 - Refusal to participate in the conference schedule to resolve nonattendance.
- ★ Petitions addressing nonattendance require documentation that the school has complied with the provisions of the law set forth in §22.1-260 and §22.1-261.
- ★ In addition to proceeding against the parent, the child may be proceeded against as a Child in Need of Supervision.

§22.1-263 Violations Constitutes Misdemeanor

This section of the *Code* establishes the penalties for violations of compulsory attendance laws. The penalties apply to the adult caretaker, are criminal sanctions, and increase in severity for a subsequent violation.

Code Contents

- ★ Any adult who does not comply with the compulsory attendance laws, or permits the child for whom he or she is responsible to be habitually absent from school is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor for the first violation.
- ★ Subsequent violations are classified as Class 2 misdemeanors.

§22.1-265 Inducing Children to Absent Themselves

This section of the *Code* establishes the activities of adults, which may include, but are not limited to, parents who induce a child to be absent or harbor them during school hours. It also provides criminal sanctions for this behavior which increase in severity with subsequent violations.

Code Contents

- ★ Any person who induces or tries to induce a child to be unlawfully absent from school or knowingly harbors a child during school hours is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor.
- ★ Subsequent violations are charged as Class 2 misdemeanors.

§22.1-267 Proceedings Against Habitually Absent Children

This section of the *Code* is unique from a legal perspective in that it authorizes the school to initiate proceedings against the child as a result of parental behavior. It also uses the term habitual to describe absences but never defines the term.

Code Contents

- ★ Any child who is permitted by his or her parents to be habitually absent from school may be proceeded against as a Child in Need of Supervision.

§16.1-241.2 Proceedings Against Certain Parents

This section of the *Code of Virginia* is a unique section within Title 16 of the *Code* in that it exclusively references the authority of the court over parents who are uncooperative with the local school system in issues regarding attendance and student conduct.

Code Contents

- ★ The school board may petition the court to proceed against parents who willfully and unreasonably fail to participate in efforts to improve the student's behavior.
- ★ If the court finds the parents have willfully and unreasonably failed to meet the requests of the principal to discuss the child's behavior or educational progress, the parent may be ordered to meet with the school representative.

<i>Summary of Attendance-Related Law Guiding School Roles and Responsibilities</i>	
§22.1-254	Compulsory Attendance Laws
§22.1-258	Appointment of Attendance Officers
§22.1-259	Teachers to Keep Daily Attendance Records
§22.1-260	Reports of Children Enrolled and Non-enrolled
§22.1-261	Duties of Attendance Officers
§22.1-262	Complaints to Court When Parents Fail to Comply
§22.1-263	Violations Constitute Misdemeanor
§22.1-265	Inducing Children to Absent Themselves
§22.1-266	Law Enforcement Officers and Truant Children
§22.1-267	Proceedings Against Habitually Absent Children
§22.1-269	Duties of the Board of Education
§22.1-279.3	Parental Responsibility and Involvement Requirements
§16.1-241.2	Proceedings Against Certain Parents

D. Courts: Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law

§16.1-241 Jurisdiction of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court

This section of the *Code* outlines the types of cases that Virginia Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Courts have the authority to hear and adjudicate. The list is quite expansive and covers a variety of issues ranging from child abuse, divorce and custody, child support, work permits, termination of parental rights, involuntary commitment of minors for psychiatric treatment, delinquency, and status offenses. Title 16 lists both types of cases as well as classes of people such as parents, guardians, children, etc. over which the court has jurisdiction.

Code Contents

- ★ Establishes jurisdiction when a child who is alleged to be a child in need of supervision.
- ★ Establishes jurisdiction when any parent or guardian of a child who has been adjudicated to be a “child in need of supervision” (see §16.1-228) if the court finds that the parents have contributed to the behavior which has brought the child to the attention of the court.

§16.1-237 Powers, Duties and Functions of Probation Officers

This section of the *Code* lists the various functions of probation officers employed by the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Probation officers who receive complaints are referred to as "intake officers." The role of the probation officer is activated once the school files a petition on behalf of the child or seeks a warrant against the parent.

Code Contents

Probation officers are authorized to:

- ★ Investigate all cases referred to him or her and prepare reports on the investigation as required.
- ★ Supervise persons placed on their caseload and keep informed of their conduct.
- ★ Use all suitable methods to improve the conduct and conditions of those placed under their supervision.
- ★ Provide persons under their supervision with a written statement of the conditions of their probation.

§16.1-248.1 Criteria for Detention and Shelter Care

This section of the *Code* defines the criteria for detention in one of Virginia’s 21 secure juvenile detention facilities. By federal law status offense cases cannot be held in a secure facility prior to the adjudicatory hearing for more than 72 hours. They can be detained only if they fail to appear in court.

Code Contents

- ★ A juvenile may be detained in a secure facility upon a finding by a judge, magistrate, or intake officer that:
 - A child alleged to be in need of supervision may be detained for good cause only until the next day the court sits and in no case longer than for seventy-two hours.
 - The juvenile failed to appear in court after having been served by a summons.

§16.1-260 Intake: Petition: Investigation

This is a lengthy section explaining the procedures of the intake unit of the Juvenile Court in responding to the wide variety of cases that are brought to them. It explains the legal requirements for acceptance of different types of petitions, the parameters of intake officer discretion in accepting petitions, the burden of proof required at the stage of legal proceedings, and the types of cases for which the decisions made at intake can be appealed. The information below applies only to truant children and their parents.

Code Contents

- ★ All matters that are alleged to be within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court shall be initiated by the filing of a petition.
- ★ Complaints and requests for filing petitions is the responsibility of the intake officer.
- ★ The appearance of a child before an intake officer may be in person or through video/audio communication.
- ★ In cases of truancy, if the juvenile has not previously been proceeded against informally or adjudicated in need of supervision for failure to comply with compulsory school attendance, the intake officer may defer filing the complaint for 90 days and proceed informally by developing a truancy plan.
- ★ The truancy plan may include requirements that the juvenile and his parent or parents, guardian, or other person standing in loco parentis participate in such programs, cooperate in such treatment or be subject to such conditions and limitations as necessary to ensure the juvenile's compliance with compulsory school attendance.
- ★ The intake officer may refer the juvenile to the appropriate public agency for the purpose of developing a truancy plan using an interagency interdisciplinary team approach.
- ★ If, at the end of the 90-day period, the juvenile has not successfully completed the truancy plan or the truancy program, then the intake officer shall file the petition.

§16.1-266 Appointment of Counsel

This section explains the different kinds of legal representation available to persons who appear before Juvenile Courts. Attorneys who are appointed in cases involving child abuse or neglect, termination of parental rights or entrustment agreements are called Guardians Ad Litem and are responsible for the representation of the child's best interest as opposed to the provision of the rigorous defense of the child. (Rules of Court 8:6) This is an important distinction when the child may wish one outcome and the attorney, serving as a Guardian Ad Litem, believes another outcome would be in the child's best interest. A Guardian Ad Litem must be appointed in abuse and neglect cases; it is a discretionary appointment in truancy cases. When there is a Guardian Ad Litem appointed in a truancy case, usually defense counsel will also be appointed.

Code Contents

- ★ Prior to a court hearing regarding child abuse and neglect, entrustment agreements, termination of parental rights, or whose parent desires to be relieved of custody, a Guardian Ad Litem shall be appointed.
- ★ Prior to a detention review, adjudicatory, or transfer to circuit court hearing involving a child in need of services, child in need of supervision or a delinquent, the child and his or her parent shall be advised of the right to legal counsel and their liability for the costs of those legal services. The parent and child shall be given the opportunity to:
 - Employ counsel of the child's choice.

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- Have the court appoint an attorney if it is determined the child is indigent.
 - Provide written waiver of the child’s right to representation by an attorney.
 - ★ In all other cases which, in the discretion of the court require the appointment of an attorney or Guardian Ad Litem.
 - ★ Any state or local agency shall permit a Guardian Ad Litem to inspect and copy any records relating to the child, without the consent of the child.

§16.1-273 Court May Require Investigation of Social History and Preparation of Victim Impact Statement

This section of the *Code* describes the types of information the judge may request to be gathered prior to a disposition of a case. The juvenile court proceedings have two phases. The first phase, adjudication, is when guilt or innocence is established. The second, dispositional phase addresses the ‘sentence’ or services to be ordered.

Code Contents

- ★ When the court has adjudicated a case, prior to the disposition, the judge may require an investigation of the child which:
 - Shall include drug screening.
 - May include the mental, physical, and social conditions of the child's environment, his or her personality and the facts and circumstances surrounding the violation of the law.

§16.1-278 Cooperation of Certain Agencies, Officials, Institutions and Associations

This short section of the *Code* serves as a preamble for all the dispositions available to the juvenile court and demonstrates the court’s dependence on the provision of services by and cooperation among other agencies.

Code Contents

- ★ The judge may order any state, county, or municipal officer or employee or governmental agency to render information, assistance, services, or cooperation as may be provided for by law.
- ★ The court is authorized to cooperate with and make use of public and private societies or organizations in order to assist the court in protecting the welfare of the children and families that appear before them.

§16.1-278.5 Children in Need of Supervision

This section of the *Code* sets forth the dispositions available to the juvenile court for truant children and their parents. All of the dispositions available to a child in need of services also apply to a child in need of supervision. The dispositions of the juvenile court allow the judges to order parents as well as the child to participate in services. The more punitive sanctions are addressed in the following section of the Guide.

Code Contents

- ★ If a child is found to be in need of supervision, the court, prior to making the final disposition, shall direct whatever public agency it believes is appropriate to evaluate the child's needs using an interdisciplinary team. This team may be the team established for the Comprehensive Services Act or any other team established by the community.

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- ★ If there has been an interagency staffing of the child within 90 days prior to the adjudication, the court may consider the findings of that team in lieu of ordering another staffing.
 - ★ The court may make any of the following dispositions:
 - Permit the child to remain with his or her parents subject to the conditions the court shall impose.
 - Order the parent to participate in programs or be subject to the conditions the court may impose for the rehabilitation of the child and parent.
 - If child is older than 14 and the court finds the child is not benefiting from school, excuse the child from compliance with compulsory attendance or authorize the child to be employed.
 - Place the child in residential care.
 - Transfer legal custody of the child to a relative or other individual found qualified to receive the child.
 - Require the child to participate in public service projects.
 - Place the child on probation.
 - If the court finds that the parent has willfully disobeyed a court order to comply with school attendance, the court may impose a jail sentence on the parent.

§ 16.1-241.2. Proceedings against certain parents.

This section authorizes the court to proceed against parents found to have willfully and unreasonably failed to meet with school personnel to ensure their child's school attendance.

Code Contents

- ★ The court is authorized to order the student or parent:
 - To participate in programs deemed appropriate including, but not limited to, extended day programs and summer school or other education programs and counseling.
 - To be subject to conditions and limitations that the court deems appropriate.
- ★ Additionally, the court may order the parent to pay a civil penalty not to exceed \$500.
- ★ The court is authorized to use its contempt power to enforce any order.
- ★ The court shall order the participant in any treatment, counseling, or other program for the rehabilitation of a minor child or his family to pay as much of the applicable fee for participation as such person is able to pay. A finding of guilt shall not be required for the court to order such payment.

§16.1-292- Violation of a Court Order by Any Person

This section of the *Code* identifies the punitive sanctions available to the court when the child or the parents fail to comply with the order of the court.

Code Contents

- ★ Any person violating an order of the court entered as part of a dispositional order (§16.1-278.5), may be proceeded against either for the violation or as a contempt of court case.
- ★ If the court finds a child in need of supervision willingly failed to comply with the order of the court, it may order any of the following:
 - Suspension of the child's driver's license.
 - Order the child 14 or older to be placed in a foster or group home.
 - If all other treatment options in the community have been exhausted, detain the child in a secure detention home for a period not to exceed ten days.

- If ordered to detention, the court shall reconvene the multidisciplinary team that initially evaluated the case to develop further treatment plans.

§18.2-371 Causing or Encouraging Acts Rendering a Child Delinquent, Abused, etc.

This section is a part of the criminal *Code* and authorizes criminal sanctions against adults who are held responsible for the child’s nonattendance. The penalties in this section are considerably higher than those in the educational or Juvenile Court sections of the *Code* and include jail time.

Code Contents

- ★ Any person 18 years of age or older including the parent who willfully contributes, encourages, or causes any act or condition which renders a child delinquent, in need of services, in need of supervision, or abused or neglected shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

<i>Summary of Attendance-Related Laws Guiding Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Roles and Responsibilities</i>	
§16.1-241	Jurisdiction
§16.1-228	Definitions
§16.1-237	Powers and Functions of Probation Officer
§16.1-241.2	Proceedings Against Certain Parents
§16.1-248.1	Criteria for Detention and Shelter Care
§16.1-256	Limitations on Issuance of Warrants for Juveniles
§16.1-259	Procedures in Cases of Adults
§16.1-260	Intake; Petition: Investigation
§16.1-262	Form and Content of Petition
§16.1-266	Appointment of Counsel
§16.1-273	Court May Require Investigation of Social History
§16.1-278	Cooperation of Agencies
§16.1-278.5	Dispositions for Child in Need of Supervision
§16.1-292	Violation of a Court Order by Any Person
§18.2-371	Causing or Encouraging Acts Rendering a Child Delinquent

E. Other Roles and Responsibilities Defined in Law

Commonwealth Attorney

§22.1-268 Duty of Attorneys for the Commonwealth to Prosecute Cases Arising Under the Article

This section of the *Code* requires commonwealth attorneys to prosecute all truancy cases. However, the requirement, according to the notes in the *Code* is contingent upon the receipt of funding which was never provided. By law, prosecutors have discretion in their decision to prosecute misdemeanor and status offenses. The involvement of the commonwealth attorney's office in truancy cases varies greatly across the state.

Code Contents

- ★ It is the duty of the commonwealth attorneys to prosecute all cases arising out of violations of the attendance laws.
- ★ The juvenile court has exclusive jurisdiction of these cases.

§16.1-232 Attorney for the Commonwealth to Prosecute Certain Cases and Represent Commonwealth on Appeal

This section directly contradicts §22.1-268 by allowing the commonwealth attorney discretion in handling all non-felony cases in juvenile court. Status offense cases (which is how a child in need of services is classified) are not specifically referenced.

Code Contents

- ★ The attorney for the commonwealth shall prosecute all felony charges in juvenile court unless expressly relieved of the case by court order.
- ★ At their discretion, they may prosecute misdemeanor charges.
- ★ They shall represent the commonwealth on cases appealed from the juvenile court to the circuit court.

<i>Summary of Attendance-Related Laws Guiding Commonwealth Attorneys' Roles and Responsibilities</i>	
§22.1-268	Commonwealth Attorney to Prosecute
§16.1-232	Attorney for the Commonwealth to Prosecute Certain Cases

Defense Counsel and Guardian Ad Litem

§16.1-266 Appointment of Counsel

This section of the *Code* explains the different type of legal representation available to those persons who appear before juvenile court. Attorneys who are appointed in cases involving child abuse or neglect, termination of parental rights or entrustment agreements are called Guardian Ad Litem and are responsible for the representation of the child's best interest as opposed to the provision of the rigorous defense of the child. (Rules of Court 8:6) This is an important distinction when the child may wish one outcome and the attorney, serving as a

Guardian Ad Litem, believes another outcome would be in the child’s best interest. A Guardian Ad Litem must be appointed in abuse and neglect cases; it is a discretionary appointment in truancy cases. When there is a Guardian Ad Litem appointed in a truancy case, usually, defense counsel will also be appointed.

Code Contents

- ★ Prior to a court hearing regarding child abuse and neglect, entrustment agreements, termination of parental rights, or when a parent desires to be relieved of custody, a Guardian Ad Litem shall be appointed.
- ★ Prior to a detention review, adjudicatory, or transfer to circuit court hearing involving a child in need of services, child in need of supervision, or a delinquent, the child and their parents shall be advised of the right to legal counsel and their liability for the costs of those legal services. The parent and child shall be given the opportunity to:
 - Employ counsel of the child’s choice.
 - Have the court appoint an attorney if it is determined that the child is indigent.
 - Provide written waiver of the child’s right to representation by an attorney.
- ★ In all other cases which, in the discretion of the court, require the appointment of an attorney or Guardian Ad Litem.
- ★ Any state or local agency shall permit a Guardian Ad Litem to inspect and copy any records relating to the child, without the consent of the child.

<i>Summary of Attendance-Related Laws Guiding Defense Bar Roles and Responsibilities</i>	
§16.1-266	Appointment of Counsel
Rules of Court 8:6	Role of Guardian Ad Litem when Representing a Child

Law Enforcement

§22.1-266 Law Enforcement Officers and Truant Children

This section of the *Code* addresses how law enforcement officers identify the truant and their statutory responsibility toward truants.

Code Contents

- ★ Any law enforcement officer or attendance officer may pick up any child who:
 - Is reported to be truant from the schools
 - Who is reasonably determined to be a public school student and is either truant or has been expelled.
- ★ The officer may deliver the child to the appropriate school, alternative education program, or truancy center.
- ★ The officers are authorized to transport the pupil to any of the above-listed sites without charging the parent or child with violation of the law.

<i>Summary of Attendance-Related Laws Guiding Law Enforcement Roles and Responsibilities</i>	
§22.1-266	Law Enforcement Officers and Truant Children

F. Department of Social Services Responsibilities

§63.1-105.4 Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)

This section follows a series of *Code* sections that address eligibility requirements for receipt of a variety of forms of public assistance. It establishes the expectations for parents to enforce school attendance, the student to attend school, local schools to provide information to local departments of social service in order to monitor school attendance and provide consequences for nonattendance.

Code Contents

- ★ To be eligible to receive assistance, dependent children must be in compliance with the compulsory school attendance laws.
- ★ The Board of the State Department of Social Services is to promulgate regulations to implement the provisions of this law. These regulations are to include procedures to:
 - Receive notification from schools of students who are truant.
 - Assist families to achieve compliance with the school attendance laws.
- ★ If a family member is not in compliance with the compulsory attendance law, that individual is ineligible to receive financial assistance until becoming compliant.

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) PROGRAM COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (LEARNFARE) REQUIREMENT

Source: Virginia Department of Social Services

What is TANF?

- With the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) signed into law by President Clinton on August 22, 1996, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program was eliminated.
- In its place, PRWORA created a block grant for states to provide time-limited cash assistance for needy families, known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- TANF was implemented in Virginia on February 1, 1997, reflecting changes mandated under PRWORA but otherwise continuing the requirements of the AFDC Program.

Background of the “Learnfare” Requirement

- In the past, the AFDC Program placed little emphasis on keeping children in school. Under federal regulations, except for 16- or 17-year-old children, school attendance was not a condition of eligibility. The only incentive to remain in school was the exclusion of earnings of secondary level students in determining the family’s financial eligibility and monthly benefits.
- In July 1, 1995, Virginia initiated major welfare reforms built upon the principles of self-reliance, personal responsibility, strengthened families, and community involvement.
- A major provision of this program was the “Learnfare” requirement that makes eligibility for AFDC (now TANF) of children and minor custodial parents contingent upon compliance with state compulsory school attendance laws.
- The requirement is a preventive measure, with penalties instituted only as a last resort when there is non-cooperation in working toward achieving compliance with school attendance laws. As long as the family follows the plan developed by the local department of social services and the parent or other caretaker/relative, the child remains eligible for TANF benefits during the intervention period.
- This provision can only work if school divisions report children who are truant. Through early intervention by the local department of social services and assistance from school staff, attendance problems otherwise unknown or beyond the capability of the parent to address alone can be identified before they have passed the point of resolution.

The TANF “Learnfare” Provision

- Children must meet the state compulsory school attendance requirement. They are considered as meeting this requirement until such time as the local department of social services receives notification that a child is truant.

-
- Upon notification of truancy, the local department of social services (LDSS) attempts to contact the parent or other caretaker/relative with whom the child resides to initiate efforts to identify and resolve the attendance problem.
 - The next step is to set up an intervention plan. The plan must specify the following:
 - the reason for nonattendance
 - a time frame for achieving compliance
 - a schedule of events that the caretaker agrees to complete, and
 - what performance constitutes compliance.
 - As long as the plan is being followed, the child remains eligible for TANF benefits. If not followed, the child's portion of the TANF benefits is terminated.
 - Localities have been given flexibility in setting up procedures for coordination with the local school system. Each LDSS and school division are responsible for establishing procedures for identifying and reporting truant TANF children to the LDSS and for working together with the truant child and his family to resolve the truancy problem.
 - For this provision to work, there must be a good working relationship between the school division and the LDSS, with children who are truant reported quickly once the school division has determined that the child is either not enrolled or is not attending and the school's efforts to contact the parent have failed. This information should be communicated at least monthly, so that the LDSS can begin working with the family to reach compliance.

Does the Sanctioning of a Child in TANF Affect his Eligibility for other Assistance?

- The child's eligibility for Medicaid is not affected.
- The family's Food Stamp benefits are not reduced in response to the child's failure to attend school. However, the sanction in TANF does preclude increasing Food Stamp benefits when the TANF benefits are reduced.

II. Meeting Virginia's Legal Requirements

A. School Procedures

This section focuses on key procedural elements to ensure compliance with statutory requirements in cases of non-enrollment and nonattendance. Schools must develop and adopt internal policies and procedures to carry out numerous attendance-related responsibilities that are set forth in law and to document their compliance with requirements.

Procedures for keeping daily attendance records and accounting for students enrolled are well established as part of central school administrative functions. The Virginia Administrative Code includes Regulations Governing Pupil Accounting Records (Chapter 110).

Although the responsibilities of schools are uniform across the Commonwealth, procedures to comply with set forth in law must be tailored to local practices and resources. Compliance with statutory requirements is necessary; local practices and procedures, however, may vary considerably among Virginia's diverse school divisions.

Appointment of attendance officers

The *Code* requires local school boards to appoint an attendance officer; the division superintendent is considered the attendance officer when no attendance officer has been appointed. In many Virginia school divisions, the school social worker/visiting teacher also serves as the attendance officer.

Key procedural elements:

Notification of Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Some school divisions send an official notification to the local Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court naming the person or position appointed to serve as the attendance officer. The notification constitutes written documentation that the appointee has the authority to act in the capacity of the attendance officer, including filing complaints with the court.

Attendance officer job description. A written job description specifying duties and responsibilities of the attendance officer can help clarify "who does what" in managing cases of nonattendance. Various sections of the *Code* assign attendance-related responsibilities to the division superintendent, to the attendance officer, to the principal, and to designees. Written job descriptions that specify attendance-related duties of each can contribute to operational clarity within the local school division.

Non-enrollment

Schools are required to identify cases of non-enrollment and notify the parent of the requirement for school attendance. Although the *Code* focuses on identification and notification at the beginning of the school year, reports of non-enrolled children may be received throughout the year.

Key procedural elements:

Identification and investigation of cases. School procedures should define responsibilities and the process for identifying and investigating cases at the beginning of the school year as well as subsequent reports of non-attendance.

Non-attendance

Students fail to attend school for many reasons -- some clearly legitimate, some clearly without parent awareness or support, and some for unclear reasons that require further investigation. School policy must define excused and unexcused absences. Procedures must define points at which investigation and further activities are triggered.

The *Code* reflects a graduated approach to intervention ranging from a “reasonable effort” to notify the parent of absences to “direct contact” to an in-person conference with prescribed timelines to court intervention. An overview of this graduated approach is reflected in the table below:

Overview of Virginia’s Laws Reflecting a Graduated Approach to Truancy Intervention	
Circumstance	Required Action
Any absence when parent is unaware and supports the absence	Reasonable effort to notify by telephone and to obtain an explanation of absence.
5 absences	Reasonable effort to have “direct contact” via telephone or in person to explain consequences of continued nonattendance and to jointly develop a plan to resolve nonattendance.
6 th absence	In-person conference scheduled in 10 days, held not later than 15 days, to resolve issues related to nonattendance. Conference may include other community service providers; produce attendance plan.
Next absence, after conference	Enforcement of the law through either (i) CHINS complaint or (ii) proceedings against parents.

Key procedural elements:

Procedures to carry out actions required by the *Code* and a process for documenting such actions and gathering important case-specific information are required.

Notification of parent re: absences. School division procedures should define who will make calls to parents about absences, how the contact and explanations for absences will be documented, and what constitutes “reasonable effort.” A parent’s explanation for an absence given in the first telephone contact may reveal serious problems requiring expedited intervention or may become important evidence in subsequent proceedings against a parent. A sample Record of Parent/Guardian Notification Regarding Pupil Absence is provided in Appendix A.

Direct contact. School division procedures should define who will make “direct contact” with the parent, at what point in time the attendance officer is to become involved, and how the contact and plan for resolving nonattendance will be documented. Again, what constitutes “reasonable effort” should be defined. A sample Record of Direct Contact with Parent/Guardian Regarding Pupil Absences is provided in Appendix A.

Documentation of educational needs and services. The *Code* requires that any child against whom a truancy complaint is filed “has been offered an adequate opportunity to receive the benefit of any and all educational services and programs that are required to be provided by law and which meet the child’s particular educational needs . . .” This requirement places upon the school division an obligation to demonstrate with some degree of certainty that the student’s educational needs are being met. In some cases, this is reasonably easy to do based on a review of the student’s educational records and history within the school division; in other cases, such as those involving students newly transferred into a school division, there may be less certainty about educational needs and the suitability of the educational programs and services being offered.

School division guidelines and procedures can ensure the systematic examination of a student’s educational program and documentation of its suitability. Procedures might call for an internal review by a school’s student intervention team or a child study committee. The review of educational needs and the development of plans to resolve nonattendance are interrelated; any plan must take into account identified needs.

B. Interagency Approaches

Investigations of cases of irregular school attendance typically reveal a variety of problems requiring assistance and intervention. Educational problems are clearly the responsibility of schools; other problems, however, may require an interagency approach to secure needed services from other community service providers.

Key procedural elements:

Parent conference. School division procedures should define how the parent conference required by §22.1-258 is to be scheduled and how compliance with prescribed timelines will be documented. It is important to note that although involvement of other community service providers in resolving issues related to nonattendance is not specifically required prior to this stage, the school division may assist a parent in accessing needed services much earlier in the process -- as soon as a problem is identified. School division procedures should include a mechanism for assisting parents at the earliest point. For example, if a parent reports problems in the first telephone notification, the case should come to the attention of the guidance counselor, school social worker, and/or attendance officer at that point rather than waiting for absences to accumulate. A sample Record of Parent/Guardian Conference Regarding Pupil Absences is provided in Appendix A.

A checklist for use in developing attendance procedures is provided below:

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

Appointment of attendance officers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	School board appointment made
<input type="checkbox"/>	Court notified
<input type="checkbox"/>	Job description developed
Non-enrollment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established to identify non-enrollment at beginning of school year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established to investigate ongoing reports of non-enrollment
Nonattendance	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established to notify parent of absences and obtain explanation for absences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established for documenting parent notifications of absences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established to ensure direct contact with parent at five absences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established for documenting direct contact and development of attendance plan, including reasons for nonattendance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established to ensure parent conference after six absences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established to document compliance with timelines for scheduling/holding parent conference, interagency involvement, and attendance plan developed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established for review of educational needs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process developed for case monitoring/review of attendance plan implementation
Preparation for Court Referral	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established for consultation with school board attorney
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process established for superintendent notification/approval when parents are proceeded against
<input type="checkbox"/>	Procedure established for filing complaints with court

C. Seeking Authority of Court

When schools are unable to resolve cases of non-enrollment or nonattendance, court intervention may be pursued. Avenues for court intervention, however, are multiple and professional judgment is required in determining the appropriate procedures.

Local court-school guidelines and procedures for pursuing court intervention should be the product of school and court dialogue, beginning with the division superintendent and the juvenile court judge and involving the school division attendance officer and other key school administrators, the court service unit administrators, and the county/city/school board attorney. Many important questions can be addressed through discussion during collaborative development of local guidelines and procedures.

When should court intervention be pursued?

Although §22.1-258 of the *Code of Virginia* sets forth a series of graduated interventions and requires the school division to “enforce provisions of this article” when a pupil continues to be absent from school, the *Code* also authorizes schools “to seek immediate compliance.”

Local guidelines and procedures, collaboratively developed by the school division and juvenile court, can clarify the conditions under which schools can seek this “immediate compliance” and conditions under which other interventions are to be instituted first.

CHINS petition or proceedings against parents?

In seeking court intervention, schools are authorized in §22.1-258 to pursue either or both of the following:

- (i) filing a CHINS petition
- (ii) instituting proceedings against the parent pursuant to §18.2-371 or §22.1-262.

School attendance is clearly defined as the responsibility of parents in §22.1-254 of the *Code* and, more recently, in §22.1-279.3. In practice, younger children are considered under the control of parents while older children are considered to have greater capacity to be “willfully” absent from school of their own accord. Case-specific factors will determine the course of action to be taken; however, as a practical matter,

- schools are more likely to proceed against parents in cases involving younger children;
- schools are more likely to seek CHINS petitions in cases involving older students; and
- schools may pursue complaints against both when there is evidence of willful absence on the part of the student and evidence that parents are not carrying out their responsibilities set forth in law.

In filing a CHINS complaint, schools must demonstrate the following:

- The child is habitually and without justification absent from school;
- The child has had adequate opportunity to benefit from educational programs and services required to be provided to meet the child’s particular educational needs;
- The school system has made a reasonable effort to effect the child’s regular school attendance; and
- The school system has documentation of compliance with §22.1-258.

Local guidelines, developed collaboratively by the school division and juvenile court, can provide guidance about whether action should focus on the child, the parent, or both. Local court-school procedures also can clarify the nature and quality of documentation required to demonstrate compliance with statutory requirements.

Use of Interagency Interdisciplinary Team Approach.

It is important to recognize that the intake officer may defer filing the complaint for 90 days and proceed informally by developing a truancy plan. The truancy plan may include requirements that the juvenile and his parent or parents, guardian, or other person standing in loco parentis participate in such programs, cooperate in such treatment, or be subject to such conditions and limitations as necessary to ensure the juvenile's compliance with compulsory school attendance.

The intake officer may refer the juvenile to the appropriate public agency for the purpose of developing a truancy plan using an interagency interdisciplinary team approach. If, at the end of the 90-day period, the juvenile has not successfully completed the truancy plan or the truancy program, then the intake officer shall file the petition.

Prior to seeking court intervention, schools may also involve community service providers in developing an plan to resolve issues related to nonattendance, pursuant to §22.1-258 of the *Code*.

Virginia law clearly supports an interagency interdisciplinary approach to resolving problems that contribute to nonattendance. Local guidelines and procedures can help clarify the circumstance and timing of interagency involvement and identify the interagency interdisciplinary body with responsibility for such cases. Some communities may use family assessment and planning teams (FAPT) operating as a part of the Comprehensive Services Act and others may use independently formed interagency multidisciplinary teams formed by the court to deal with court-referred cases.

Proceedings Against Parents

If schools institute proceedings against parents pursuant to §18.2-371 of the *Code*, there must be evidence that the parent has willfully contributed to, encouraged, or caused any act, omission, or conditions that render a child in need of supervision.

If schools institute proceedings against parents pursuant to §22.1-262 of the *Code*, there must be evidence that a parent has either failed to comply with provisions of §22.1-261 within the time specified in notice, failed to comply with provisions of §22.1-254, or refused to participate in the development of the plan to resolve the student's nonattendance or in the conference provided for in §22.1-258. There must be documentation of compliance with §22.1-258 and the action must be taken with the awareness or approval of the division superintendent.

If schools institute proceedings against parents pursuant to §22.1-279.3 there must be evidence that the parent has willfully and unreasonably refused to meet to review the parent's responsibility to ensure the child's in attendance and discuss improvement. This is a new option enacted by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004; therefore, court procedures for handling these kinds of complaints are may not yet be established.

Locally developed court-school guidelines can provide guidance about circumstances under which various proceedings may be initiated and how such complaints will be filed. Local court-school procedures also can clarify the nature and quality of evidence necessary to meet statutory requirements.

D. Documenting Attendance Cases

The Code sets forth numerous responsibilities for schools in pursuing a resolution in cases of chronic nonattendance. If legal action is pursued, documentation the school has fulfilled its responsibilities is critically important. If documentation is lacking, then access to the court may be precluded. A systematic approach to documenting activities in all attendance cases is a critical element of truancy intervention. A documentation checklist for juvenile court referral is provided on the following page:

Documentation Checklist for Juvenile Court Referral

Child in Need of Supervision (CHINSup – Truancy) – Pursuant to §22.1-258

Requirements	Y	N	NA	Nature of Documentation (attach copies)
Child subject to compulsory attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Pupil habitually and without justification absent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Child offered required educational program/services to meet needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
School's reasonable efforts to effect regular attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Notification of both parents if joint custody	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Documentation of compliance with §22.1-258	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Record of parent notifications of pupil absences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Record of direct contact w/ parent; development of initial attendance plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Record of interagency parent conference;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Attendance Plan developed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	
Additional information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	

Proceedings Against Pursuant to §22.1-262

Requirements	Y	N	NA	Nature of Documentation (attach copies)
Child subject to compulsory attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Parent fails to comply with provisions of §22.1-261 within time specified in notice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Parent fails to comply with provisions of §22.1-254	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Parent refuses to participate in the development of the plan to resolve the student's nonattendance or in the conference provided for in §22.1-258	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Documentation of compliance with §22.1-258	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Superintendent aware of/approved complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	--	

Proceedings Against Pursuant to §18.2-371

Requirements	Y	N	NA	Nature of Documentation (attach copies)
Child subject to compulsory attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Parent willfully contributes to, encourages, or causes any act, omission or conditions which renders a child in need of supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Proceedings Against Pursuant to §22.1-279.3 (Parental responsibility and involvement responsibilities)

Requirements	Y	N	NA	Nature of Documentation (attach copies)
Child subject to compulsory attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Parent has willfully and unreasonably refused to meet pursuant to §22.1-279.3 to review parent's responsibility to ensure child's in attendance and discuss improvement in attendance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

III. Strategies for Effective School-Court Collaboration

A. Communication

School-court collaboration begins with communication. The shared goal of regular student school attendance can serve as a foundation for beginning an ongoing discussion between school and court officials. Virginia's Superintendents-Judges Liaison Committee has identified numerous approaches to reduce truancy in schools. Some of the approaches are described in this section.

Communications are best begun before seeking court intervention with particular cases. A dialogue beginning with the division superintendent and the juvenile court judge and later involving the school division attendance officer and other key school administrators, the court service unit administrators, and the county/city/school board attorney will establish a foundation for understanding and collaboration to achieve the shared goal of school attendance.

B. Joint Planning

As noted in the previous section, many important questions can be addressed through dialogue and the development of local guidelines and procedures. Issues to be addressed through joint planning include the following:

- Under what circumstances and at what stage is court intervention to be sought?
- What are the key considerations in deciding to pursue a CHINS petition, a complaint against the parent, or both?
- What is the nature and quality of documentation schools are required to have to demonstrate compliance with statutory requirements?
- How does the locality operationalize an interagency interdisciplinary approach?

Additional issues that can be addressed through a collaborative planning process are as follows:

How are attendance-related cases to be handled at intake?

- Some localities have scheduled particular days and times for the filing of truancy petitions.

How are complaints against parents to be filed?

- Some localities have developed protocols with magistrates to facilitate the filing of such complaints. The county/city/school board attorney can be helpful in establishing these protocols.

How will be the court handle cases referred?

- Some localities have organized dockets to expedite such cases, particularly when children are not attending school. Some courts have established a regular docket for hearing truancy cases (e.g., one morning every other week). Other localities coordinate court referrals with family assessment and planning team meetings.

Juvenile court judges and court services professionals can support school prevention and early intervention efforts by supporting school and community norms that encourage school attendance and by creating a community response to truancy. The judge or court staff might speak at parent meetings and student assemblies, emphasizing the importance of regular school attendance.

C. Training / Orientation

The following strategies can be used to increase understanding between schools and courts, an important prerequisite to collaboration.

Training of key school personnel in court processes

Train key school personnel (e.g., attendance officers, guidance counselors, principals, assistant principals, and school social workers) on the court process. The juvenile court judge and intake officer might provide this training. Topics could include:

- statutory requirements associated with finding a child to be a child in need of supervision;
- information the court needs to determine that the school has met its obligations to address truancy under §16.1-228 (child in need of supervision definition) of the Code of Virginia;
- how to file a petition;
- how to file a complaint against a parent for failure to send a child to school;
- circumstances under which a truancy plan may be developed;
- how court hearings are conducted;
- the role of court appointed special advocates; and
- what types of dispositional alternatives are available to the court in cases of truancy

Train school officials on how to present evidence effectively in court cases. A representative from the commonwealth's attorney's office might provide this type training.

Orientation of court personnel to school truancy prevention/intervention

Orient court personnel to school truancy prevention/intervention efforts. The school attendance officer and key administrators might provide this orientation, possibly at an alternative program site. Topics could include:

- school attendance policies;
- internal processes used by the school for early identification and intervention of students developing problem attendance patterns;
- types of assessments conducted to determine educational needs;
- types of instructional and support services provided;
- types of alternative and individualized programs offered; and
- ways that students and their families are linked to community services to address underlying problems contributing to poor attendance.

Glossary of Selected Terms Commonly Used in Virginia’s Juvenile Justice System

Source: Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. Full document may be accessed at: http://www.djj.state.va.us/about/glossary_djj_system.pdf

Like all fields of professional practice, Virginia’s juvenile justice system has its own language. Specialized terms are necessary for accurate communication among practitioners in the field, but may hinder communication with those who are not familiar with the terms and references. The lists below are intended as a layperson’s guide to the definitions and abbreviations most commonly used in Virginia’s juvenile justice system.

The definitions are written in plain English, offering the ordinary meaning of the terms, and not necessarily the technical definition. Also, the terms may have broader or additional specific meanings when used in other contexts. Persons who apply and interpret policies, procedures and regulations are responsible for knowing the legal or technical definition of all terms used in their work. (In the list below, a notation following the definition refers to a fuller or more technically complete definition appearing in statute or regulation.)

Term	Definition
Adjudication	the finding by the court that the accused is guilty or not guilty of the offense charged, based on testimony and evidence presented.
Adjudicatory Hearing	the court hearing where innocence or guilt is determined. Witnesses and testimony are presented, similar to a trial.
Child in Need of Services	a child whose behavior, conduct or condition presents or results in a serious threat to the well-being and physical safety of the child. (See COV § 16.1-228).
Child in Need of Supervision	a child who habitually and without justification is absent from school despite opportunity and reasonable efforts to keep him in school or who habitually runs away from home or a residential care court placement. (See COV §16.1-288).
Complaint	an allegation brought to an intake officer that a juvenile is a child in need of services, a child is in need of supervision or is alleged to have committed a delinquent act.
Court order	an order issued by a state or federal court and signed by a judge.
Court service unit (CSU)	a local or state agency that provides important services on behalf of the juvenile and domestic relations district court, including intake, investigations and reports, probation, parole, counseling, and other related services in the community.
Delinquent child	a child who has committed a delinquent act or an adult who has committed a delinquent act prior to his eighteenth birthday, except where the jurisdiction of the juvenile court has been terminated under the provisions of § 16.1-269.6.

Term	Definition
Delinquent offense	an act committed by a juvenile that would be a felony or misdemeanor if committed by an adult. A delinquent offense does not include an act that is otherwise lawful but prohibited to juveniles.
Detention	in its broadest sense, means temporarily placing an individual in a secure setting resulting in the individual's loss of freedom. "Secure detention" means temporary care of a child alleged to be delinquent in physically restricting facilities and providing intensive supervision pending court disposition or execution of a court order.
Disposition	the court's decision on what will happen to a youth who has been found not innocent. It is analogous to the sentence imposed on an adult who has been found guilty.
Dispositional Hearing	a hearing in a juvenile case (similar to a sentencing hearing in a criminal court) at which the court imposes treatment services and sanctions on a juvenile who has been found not innocent.
Diversion	removing a youth from the juvenile justice system as a result of an intake officer's decision to proceed informally on a complaint rather than to initiate court action.. Diversion may include the provision of programs and services to youth through alternatives to the juvenile justice system or simply discontinuing the case. (See § 16.1-227 of the Code of Virginia and 6 VAC 35-150-10.)
Due process	means those procedures and safeguards that protect the rights of persons facing criminal or disciplinary charges. (See SOP-108)
Individualized service plan or individual service plan	a written plan of action to meet the needs of a specific juvenile while in direct care (See 22 VAC 42-10-10) or under probation or parole supervision (see 6VAC35-150-10.)
Intake	means the point at which a youth first makes contact with the juvenile court. An intake officer decides whether to initiate court action should or whether to refer the juvenile elsewhere.
Intake Officer	a probation officer specifically authorized to act on a complaint and to decide whether to initiate court action or take informal action prescribed by law. See Virginia Code § 16.1-260.
Juvenile	a person under the age of 18. The Code of Virginia and some regulations also use the term "child" or "youth."
Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court (J&DR)"	in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the court that usually has jurisdiction over juvenile and family-related matters.
Juvenile correctional center	a secure custody facility housing persons who are committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice and providing 24-hour supervision, education, treatment services, recreational services and a variety of special programs. (See 22 VAC 42-10-10.)
" <i>Nolle Prosequi</i> "	a decision of prosecutors to dismiss charges against defendants - Latin for "unwilling to prosecute."

Term	Definition
Offender	generically, a person under the supervision of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice.
Petition	a document filed with the court alleging that a juvenile is delinquent, a child in need of services, or an abused or neglected child, and asking that the court assume jurisdiction over the juvenile. A petition initiates formal court action.
Predispositional	the period of time from when charges are filed until the court makes a decision in the case.
Pre-dispositional Detention	confinement in a secure residential placement while a juvenile is awaiting a court disposition.
Pre-hearing detention	a juvenile correctional center means restricting a ward to a specific location, which may or may not be locked, before a due process hearing.
Postdispositional	the time between disposition and final release from supervision.
Post-dispositional Detention	placement of an adjudicated juvenile in a secure local detention facility while the juvenile is awaiting transfer to a juvenile correctional facility or as a short-term court sanction. Generally, post-dispositional detention as a sanction falls into two categories: (1) confinement for up to 30 days and, (2) confinement for longer than 30 days but less than six months. (See Virginia Code § 16.1-284.1)
Probation	court-ordered supervision of an offender in the community for a specified length of time and requiring compliance with specified rules and conditions.
Recidivism	a return to criminal behavior after conviction and treatment. DJJ defines a recidivist as a person who is found by a court to have committed a delinquent or criminal act after being placed on probation or released from confinement. (See also reoffending)
Restorative justice	nonpunitive strategies for dealing with juvenile offenders that make the justice system a healing process rather than a punishment process.
Sanction	a prescribed consequence for an offense or a rule violation.
Serious juvenile offender	a ward who was committed to the Department and given a determinate commitment as a serious offender under Virginia Code § 16.1-285.1.
Social history(also referred to as “Pre-disposition Report”)	a comprehensive investigation and report concerning an individual before the court, including current offense and prior record, psychological and educational information, physical description, employment history, driving record, health history, behavior patterns and peer and family relationships, and risk assessment results.
Status offense	an act that is an offense only when committed by a juvenile, e.g., truancy or running away.
Status offender	a child who commits an act prohibited by law which would not be criminal if committed by an adult.
Supervision Plan	a probation or parole plan for supervising offenders on community supervision based on an assessment of the offender’s needs and his or her level of risk to society.

Term	Definition
Violent juvenile felony	any of the delinquent acts enumerated in subsection B or C of § 16.1-269.1 when committed by a juvenile fourteen years of age or older. The offenses generally fall into the categories of murder, aggravated malicious wounding, felonious injury by mob, abduction, malicious wounding and malicious wounding of a law enforcement officer, felonious poisoning, adulteration of products, robbery, carjacking, rape, forcible sodomy or sexual object penetration. (See Virginia Code §16.1-228)
Ward	a juvenile who has received a determinate or an indeterminate commitment and has been received into direct care by the Department of Juvenile Justice.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE FORMS

SAMPLE 1: Report of Investigation: Non-Enrollment of Child

Child's Name: _____ DOB [documents whether child is subject to compulsory attendance]

Parent/guardian Name: [documents residence of child with person(s) responsible for attendance] _____

Address: [documents residence in county/city and jurisdiction of court, if necessary] _____

Notification: Date(s) _____

Contact Date/Method	Finding	Planned Action

Resolution: [documents method of compliance with compulsory attendance requirement] _____

Report completed by:

 Name Title Date

SAMPLE 2: Record of Parent/Guardian Notification of Pupil Absence

Ref. §22.1-258, Code of Virginia

Date/Time	Pupil Name	Explanation for absence	Initial

SAMPLE 3: Record of Direct Contact with Parent/Guardian Regarding Pupil Absences

For use at 5 absences. Ref. §22.1-258, *Code of Virginia*

Pupil Name: _____ DOB _____ School: _____

Absences this school year: _____

Method of contact with parent:

- telephone Date(s) _____
 in person Date(s) _____

Explanation given for pupil absences:

Consequences of continued nonattendance explained to parent/guardian? yes no

Plan to resolve pupil's nonattendance:

Those involved in development of plan:

- parent/guardian (required) others (specify) _____
 pupil (required) _____
 attendance officer _____

Report completed by:

Name Title Date

SAMPLE 4: Record of Parent/Guardian Conference Regarding Pupil Absences

For use at five absences. Ref. §22.1-258, *Code of Virginia*

Pupil Name: _____ DOB _____ School: _____

Absences this school year: _____ Previous direct contact (dates) _____

Date conference scheduled: _____

Conference scheduled within 10 days of sixth absence: yes no

Date conference held: _____

Conference held no later than 15 days after sixth absence: yes no

Issues identified related to nonattendance:

Plan to address issues identified:

Who (Agency/individual)	What (Action/services to be provided)	By when (beginning/ completion dates)

Date for review of plan: _____

Report completed by:

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Fairfax County Public Schools

Excerpt from Fairfax County Public Schools - Regulation 2234.4

III. ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

Each student absence for all or any part of the school day shall be supported by a valid excuse.

A. Absentee and Early Release Records

The principal shall have prepared, in the office at the end of the first hour of the school day (later in high school), a list of pupils who are absent for that day. All schools shall establish a system for administrative follow-up of unexplained absences. In elementary schools, such follow-up should occur during the first hour of the school day, including, if necessary, a call to the parent.

A permission slip signed by the parent or guardian must be on file with the principal when a student leaves the school premises during regular school hours for any reason.

B. Parent Explanation of Absence

Each student who has been absent from school for any reason other than for school business, whose parents have not called the school, shall upon return, or by the day after return, present to the principal a note from the parent, guardian, or other responsible person, which sets forth the reason(s) for the absence.

C. Excused Absences

For purposes of credit and grading, reasons for excused absences include: illness of the student, death in the family, doctor or dentist appointment, observance of a religious holiday, suspension except for certain violations as provided in the current version of Regulation 2601, or another reason acceptable to the principal or his or her designee.

The principal or his or her designee may require a physician's note in cases of chronic or long-term illness.

Parents and students are encouraged to prearrange excused absences when possible.

D. Unexcused Absences

Reasons for unexcused absences may include family and/or student vacations, child care situations, nonschool-related activities, missed school bus, or other reasons unacceptable to the principal or his or her designee.

Reasonable effort shall be made to notify the parent by phone when an unexcused absence has occurred. On the second unexcused absence for a class or classes, the parent shall be notified and a conference shall be requested.

On the third unexcused absence in the same quarter, the student shall forfeit credit (receive an F) for the quarter for the class or classes missed.

After the fifth unexcused absence, the school will refer the student to the attendance officer, who will contact the parent to notify the parent of the absences and the consequences of continued absences, obtain and document the explanation for prior unexcused absences, and develop a plan to resolve the nonattendance. If the student is absent an additional day after contact with the parent, a conference will be scheduled with school staff members, the attendance officer, the student, the parent, and, if appropriate, a community service provider. If a further unexcused absence occurs, the attendance officer will file a complaint with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, as described in Section 22.1-258 of the Code of Virginia, that the student is a child in need of supervision and/or will institute proceedings against the parent.

E. Makeup Work

When students are absent, an opportunity to make up work shall be provided. Makeup work is encouraged so that the student will profit from future instruction. For excused absences, makeup work receives credit; for

unexcused absences, makeup work receives no credit. Any exception to this practice shall require the principal's approval.

Excerpt from Fairfax County Public Schools Student Rights and Responsibilities, August 2003

B. Responsibility for Attendance

1. General

Students shall follow their assigned daily schedules unless properly excused by the principal or authorized representative. Each student shall provide a satisfactory written explanation from his or her parent for any absence from class and for the release of the student from school during the school day. Principals may at their discretion accept a personal or telephone contact with the parent in lieu of a written excuse for a student's absence. Justifiable absences include those due to illness of the student, death in the family, medical or dental appointment, personal religious obligations, or other reasons acceptable to the principal.

2. Class Cuts

A middle or high school student forfeits daily grades for each unexcused absence from a class. Credit for the class is withheld after two unexcused absences until a conference is completed. A student receives a failing grade for the quarter if he or she has three or more unexcused absences from the class. The current version of Regulation 2234 provides additional details.

3. All-Day Absences

Whenever any student accumulates a total of five unexcused days of absence in a school year, the school will refer the student to the attendance officer, and a plan to resolve the nonattendance will be developed. If an additional unexcused absence occurs in the same school year, a conference will be scheduled. If a further unexcused absence occurs in the school year, the attendance officer will file a complaint with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court as described in Section 22.1-258 of the Code of Virginia. The current version of Regulation 2234 provides additional details.

Harrisonburg Public Schools

Excerpt from Attendance

Student Services: Student Attendance (408)

Student attendance is a cooperative effort, and the school board shall involve parents and students in accepting the responsibility for good attendance.

Each parent/guardian or person having control or charge of a child within the compulsory attendance age shall be responsible for such child's regular and punctual attendance at school as required under provisions of the law.

A reasonable effort will be made to contact a parent/guardian of each absent student every day, and a log will be kept of call attempts.

Students who are absent must bring a valid note stating the reason for absence upon returning to school unless prior notification of reason by the parent/guardian has been received. Unexcused absences will be handled according to regulations issued by the superintendent.

Students shall attend school for a full day unless otherwise excused. Secondary students shall be scheduled for a full school day unless they are enrolled in a cooperative work-study program. All other exceptions to a full day schedule must be approved on an individual basis by the superintendent.

Student attendance shall be monitored and reported as required by state law and regulations.

Student Services: Student Absences/Excuses/Dismissals (408-R)

Students who are absent must bring a parental note on the first day the student returns to school stating the reason for the absence. The only excuses for absence that shall be deemed acceptable are:

1. illness (if over two days, the school may require a note from the doctor);
2. court appearance;
3. death in the family;
4. religious holidays;
5. field trips and school-related activities; and
6. extenuating circumstances which are determined by the school administration.

High School

1. Students (grades 9-12) who bring valid notes for acceptable reasons will be permitted to make up work missed.

2. Students who do not bring valid notes will not be permitted to make up work missed.

3. It is the student's responsibility to see the teacher on the day he/she returns to schedule make-up work.

Students with excused absences will be expected to make up all work missed within five days after returning to school. All work not made up within the time limit will be graded zero. Extenuating circumstances, however, may be considered by the principal or his/her designee in extending the time limit for make-up, and extensions shall be liberally granted in order to insure that a student with a valid excuse is allowed to make up missed work.

4. Students must make up all written work, tests, and quizzes missed during a suspension. The number of days allowed for the make-up work to be completed will be determined by the length of suspension. For example, upon return from a two-day suspension the student will have two days to complete all make-up work. The maximum allowable time for making up work missed during a suspension that exceeds five days will be five days.

All written assignments given prior to a suspension that are due at any point during the suspension are due the day the student returns to class. Also, any assignment given prior to a suspension which has a due date the day the student returns to class must be turned in at that time.

The maximum grade that can be earned for any work made up due to a suspension will be a 69. Teachers may assign lesser grades if the quality of the work so warrants. A grade of zero will be assigned to any make-up work not completed within the allowable time frame.

Students making up tests, quizzes, or assignments designed to be completed in class or in a specific amount of time may be required to come to school early, stay after school, or even complete the work in night school or another alternative setting. It may not be possible for some work (i.e. lab work, physical education activities, group work) to be made up during class time; however, individual teachers may choose to allow such make-up work or provide alternate assignments as long as they extend this privilege to all students consistently.

Middle School

1. A student will be expected to make up work for all classes missed within five days of return to school, whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Extenuating circumstances may be considered in extending the time limit.

2. Students who do not bring parental notes or who bring unacceptable excuses shall be corrected through the use of counseling and discipline procedures which may include the use of the in-school suspension program and other available programs and services.

General Provisions

Each principal will insure that teachers are accountable for the following:

1. Checking the roll each day in every class;
2. Communicating with a student's parent if poor attendance is affecting the student's progress and keeping a log of those contacts;
3. Including participation, which may be affected by attendance, in their student evaluation

Harrisonburg City Public Schools
TRUANCY PROCEDURE FLOW SHEET

- STEP 1: Student not in attendance-contact parent every day-keep a log
Ref: Policy 408
- STEP 2: Determine if excused or unexcused absences
Ref: Policies 408R and 410
- STEP 3: Teacher must communicate with parent if poor attendance is affecting student's progress. Keep a log.
Ref: Policy 408R
- STEP 4: If poor attendance is affecting the student's progress-school holds conference with the parent and parent is informed that this is a violation of the Code of Conduct. Corrective action as recommended in Policy 412R should be implemented
- STEP 5: Student has 5(five) days unexcused absences (scheduled school days) for the school year, the school's attendance officer, the student and the student's parent shall be notified of a meeting to jointly develop a plan to resolve the student's nonattendance. (Complete the Attendance Improvement Plan form).
- STEP 6: If student is absent 1 (one) additional day (unexcused) after "direct contact" with the student's parent, an interdisciplinary conference will be scheduled within (10) school days and this conference will be held within 15 (fifteen) school days after the sixth absence. (Attendance Referral and Attendance Improvement Plan forms are sent after the sixth Absence).
- STEP 7: After completion of the interdisciplinary Meeting and the student has an additional unexcused absence, the principal will notify the attendance officer. (Complete PINK copy of the Attendance Referral form and send)
- STEP 8: The Attendance Officer will then enforce the provisions of the law through the court system.

Prince William County, Virginia Procedures

PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING ATTENDANCE CONCERNS ALL SCHOOL LEVELS*

In assessing the child's attendance history, school personnel may determine that contact with the parent/guardian is necessary prior to an unexcused absence appearing on the child's record.

When the school determines that a student's **1st – 4th unexcused days of absence** for the school year have occurred, the following action will be taken:

- Designated school personnel or volunteers will make direct contact with parent/guardian. If warranted, the parent may be referred to an appropriate community resource.

Following the **5th unexcused absence**, the attendance officer will meet with the student and parent/guardian and an Action Plan will be developed. This Action Plan will be reviewed periodically at the discretion of the attendance officer, or designated school personnel, for compliance.

Following the **6th unexcused absence**, school personnel will contact the student's parent/guardian to schedule a **Truancy Conference** to be held within fifteen (15) days of the 6th unexcused absence. Students in grades 6 through 12 will also participate in this meeting.

- The purpose of this conference is to review and/or revise the Action Plan to assure the child's regular attendance and success in school.
- Those who may participate in this conference include the parent/guardian, the school psychologist or social worker, guidance counselor, attendance officer, teachers, and/or school administrator (or designee). If outside resources are invited, this becomes an MDT (Multi-Disciplinary Team) meeting.
- The Action Plan is reviewed and/or revised and signed by the school, parent/guardian, and child (in grades 6 through 12). This plan may include the following:
 - ◆ Attendance monitoring by Truancy Conference chairperson or other designee
 - ◆ Appropriate accommodations by the school and/or parent/guardian
 - ◆ Referral of the student/family to appropriate community resources
- If the case becomes court involved, this plan will be recommended to the court.

Upon the **7th unexcused absence**, a CHIN/SU petition is filed with the Court and court proceedings begin.

- If the **7th unexcused absence** is reached prior to the Truancy Conference or MDT, the CHIN/SU petition is filed with the Court Services Unit and the Truancy Conference or MDT is held as scheduled. (See the procedure under 6th absence.)

The plans developed in these meetings will be recommended to the court should court action be necessary. Plans should be developed whether or not the parent/guardian participates in the process.

*Does not include elementary schools participating in Comprehensive Child Study.

PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING ATTENDANCE CONCERNS PILOT MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOLS

In assessing the child's attendance history, school personnel may determine that contact with the parent/guardian is necessary prior to an unexcused absence appearing on the child's record.

When the school determines that a student's **1st unexcused day of absence** for the school year has occurred, the following action will be taken:

- Designated school personnel or volunteers will make direct contact with parent/guardian. If warranted, the parent may be referred to an appropriate community resource.

Following the **2nd unexcused absence**, the attendance officer will meet with the student and parent/guardian and an Action Plan will be developed. This Action Plan will be reviewed periodically at the discretion of the attendance officer, or designated school personnel, for compliance.

Following the **4th unexcused absence**, school personnel will contact the student's parent/guardian to schedule a **Truancy Conference** which is to be held within ten (10) days. Students in grades 6 through 12 will also participate in this meeting.

- The purpose of this conference is to review and/or revise the Action Plan to assure the child's regular attendance and success in school.
- Those who may participate in this conference include the parent/guardian, the school psychologist or social worker, guidance counselor, attendance officer, teachers, and/or school administrator (or designee). If outside resources are invited, this becomes an MDT (Multi-Disciplinary Team) meeting.
- The Action Plan is reviewed and/or revised and signed by the school, parent/guardian, and child (in grades 6 through 12). This plan may include the following:
 - ◆ Attendance monitoring by Truancy Conference chairperson or other designee
 - ◆ Appropriate accommodations by the school and/or parent/guardian
 - ◆ Referral to appropriate community resources or invitation of outside resources to the next meeting
- If the case becomes court involved, this plan will be recommended to the court.

After the **5th unexcused absence**, another meeting is scheduled to determine the next action. If outside resources are invited to this meeting, it becomes a **Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)** meeting. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated and the case continued.

Upon the **7th unexcused absence**, a CHIN/SU petition is filed with the Court and court proceedings begin.

- If the **7th unexcused absence** is reached prior to the Truancy Conference or MDT, the CHIN/SU petition is filed with the Court Services Unit and the Truancy Conference or MDT is held as scheduled. (See the procedure under 4th absence.)

The plans developed in these meetings will be recommended to the court should court action be necessary. Plans should be developed whether or not the parent/guardian participates in the process.

Norfolk City Public Schools

Excerpt from Norfolk Attendance Policy

Every student is expected to attend school every day, on time, unless he or she is sick or there is some other extenuating circumstance. A written excuse from the parent or guardian must be presented when a child is tardy or absent from school. The excuse should state the date, time and reason for tardiness or absence.

After two days of absence, the principal or designee shall make every effort to notify the parent/guardian of the student's absence. After a total of five days of absence, written notification of absences will be mailed to the parent/guardian. When these absences reach a total of 15 consecutive days, the student will be dropped from the school roll. Students who are absent a total of 20 or more days will not be promoted and secondary students will not be awarded a passing grade, regardless of whether the absences are excused or unexcused. Principals, however, will have the authority to review individual cases and may grant credit or promotion. Parents must call and schedule an appointment to have such cases reviewed by the principal or designee.

STUDENTS ABSENCES/EXCUSES/DISSMISSALS

Student attendance is a cooperative effort and the school board shall involve parents and students in accepting the responsibility for good attendance.

Each parent/guardian or person having control or charge of a child within the compulsory attendance age shall be responsible for such child's regular and punctual attendance at school as required under provisions of the law.

A reasonable effort shall be made to contact a parent/guardian of each student who has been absent for two consecutive days, and a log will be kept of call attempts.

Students who have been absent must bring a valid note stating the reason for absence upon returning to school. Unexcused absences shall be handled according to regulations issued by the superintendent.

Students shall attend school for a full day unless otherwise excused. Secondary students shall be scheduled for a full school day unless they are enrolled in a cooperative work-study program. All other exceptions to a full day schedule must be approved on an individual basis by the superintendent or designee.

Student attendance shall be monitored and reported as required by state law and regulations.

Hampton City Public Schools

Excerpt from Hampton Attendance Policy

High School Attendance Policy

Attendance Expectations:

Students will be expected to maintain at least 90% attendance in a class in order to receive credit. Each student will be limited to five (5), absences, or the block-scheduling equivalent, per semester in order to receive credit for the class.

NOTE: These absences are cumulative in nature within a given course. The number of days refers to class days or the block-scheduling equivalent.

Absence Verification:

The parent will be required to verify any absence within twenty-four hours (without explanation) or the absence will be classified as truancy and disciplinary action will be taken.

Consequences to Unsatisfactory Attendance:

The parent and the student will be informed when the student has three (3) absences, in a class. If the student reaches four (4) absences, in a course during a semester, the parent and student will receive a second notification to indicate that the student will fail upon the next absence. The student's grade is automatically "I". Immediately upon the fifth (5) absence the parent/guardian will be sent information about the waiver process and change in grade if the waiver is granted.

Only under EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES will the student receive a waiver for credit in any class where that student has more than five (5) absences for that semester. Extenuating circumstances include, but are not limited to, personal illness, death in the immediate family, required court appearances, official college visits and bona fide religious observances.* To apply for a waiver, the student and his/her parent/guardian must follow the appeal process.

When considering whether to grant a waiver, the student's entire attendance history for that semester must be considered.

Student Incentives for Good Attendance:

With the parent's approval, a student who maintains a "B" average and who misses no more than two (2) days* during a semester or an "A" average or better and misses no more than four (4) days* during a semester, may be exempt from the semester exam.

NOTE: Any student who is exempt may take the semester exam with the option of it not having any adverse impact on the semester grade.

* Any student absence resulting from the student's observance of a religious holiday shall not be counted as an absence for purpose of this policy, provided the parent/guardian of the student notifies the principal in writing in accordance with Board policy. This notification shall specify:

- a. the date(s) of the absence(s);
- b. the name of the religious holiday; and
- c. that the absence is due to the exercise of the student's bona fide religious beliefs.

Middle School Attendance Policy

Responsibility:

Students are expected to maintain good attendance in all classes. Their success in school depends upon it. The responsibility for the implementation and success of this policy is jointly shared by the parent/guardian, student, school officials, community agencies and all citizens of the community. All absences shall refer to a class period or the block scheduling equivalent.

Attendance Expectations:

A student may not be absent from any class more than five (5) days, in a nine week grading period in order to receive a passing grade for that class, unless EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES are documented.

The parent/guardian will be kept informed of the student's attendance.

Upon the student's return after the fourth (4th) absence in a nine-week period, the teacher/team will send written notice to the parent/guardian. A copy of the communication will be kept on file and shared with the guidance/administrative staff.

Upon the student's return after the fifth (5th) absence in a nine-week period, the teacher/team will send written notice to the parent/guardian. A copy of the communication will be kept on file and shared with the guidance/administrative staff.

Consequences to Unsatisfactory Attendance:

Upon the student's return after the sixth (6th) absence, the student's grade is "automatically "I", or the earned average, if it is less than 67. The school will have some form of verbal communication with the parent/guardian before the failing report card is sent. The administration will then mail written notification. An explanation that the grade is an attendance failure will be written on the student's report card.

When there are EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES, the student along with the student's parent/guardian may apply for a waiver.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES:

Only under extenuating circumstances will a student receive a waiver for a passing grade in any class where that student has more than five (5) absences for a nine-week grading period. Extenuating circumstances include, but are not limited to personal illness, death in the immediate family, required court appearances and approved religious observances. To apply for a waiver, the student and his/her parent or guardian must follow the appeal process.

Absence Verification For Make-up Work:

In order for the student to be allowed to receive credit for any make up work, the parent/guardian will be required to present written verification of any absence within three (3) school days of the student's return. If no written verification is received within the three (3) days of the student's return, the student will not receive credit for any make-up work completed or assigned. This verification will include the dates of the absence and an explanation of the reason(s) for the absence(s).

A class admission slip will be issued to the student for notification in all classes.

Absence With No Verification:

On the fifth (5th) absence, without verification, the grade level administrator will send a letter of explanation home to the parent/guardian requesting a conference. If the parent does not respond within seven (7) school days, a referral will be made to the School Social Worker for a home visit.

Disciplinary Actions and Attendance:

Any absence for disciplinary reasons will be counted under this policy. No student, however, may be put over the limit by one out-of-school suspension, even if the number of days for which the student is disciplined might carry the student beyond the maximum number of absences allowed. Should this occur, the student would be considered to have reached the maximum at the end of the suspension and any further absences, including out-of-school suspensions, would cause the student to exceed the limit.

Elementary Attendance Policy

Education and learning enable and empower all children. With the help of the community, regular school attendance affords every child the opportunity to learn something new, to build self-esteem, to reinforce positive values, to interact with others and to become an effective and productive citizen.

Students are expected to attend school daily and on time. Parents must notify the school of the student's absence on the day of the absence.

A written verification noting reason for absence must be submitted and signed by the parent or guardian within 24 hours after the student returns to school.

To be considered present for the day, the student must be in school at least four (4) hours on regular attendance days. To be considered present for the day, half (1/2) day kindergarten students must be present at least two (2) hours.

Schools will maintain accurate records of all student absences, tardies and early dismissals. The school's designee will give written notice to the parent of absences/tardies/early dismissals that exceed the limits (excused and/or unexcused for absences)..

A reasonable effort shall be made to notify the parent or guardian by phone of the child's absence each day the child is absent from school.

The parent must follow-up a telephone call with written explanation of the child's absence immediately upon the child's return to school.

The classroom teacher and/or attendance clerk will receive and record these written notifications from parents/guardians for no more than 5 absences.

On the 6th absence, the building principal or other administrative designee must approve any additional absences with notes from the parent/guardian. If the absence is not approved and the student is absent, it is unexcused.

After the 10th absence with notes from the parent/guardian, the principal/designee may require a doctor's note for all future absences. The principal and/or designee shall develop a corrective action plan to be signed by the parent and child.

If a student is absent more than 15 days during a school year, consideration will be given to retention, summer school and/or intersession. A Truancy Referral Packet will be considered and the "truancy referral process" beyond the building level may begin.

After 15 days of consecutive, unverified absences, the child will be withdrawn from the attendance roll in accordance with state regulations.

If there is no written verification for an absence, the absence is marked unexcused.

On the 5th unexcused absence, a "Corrective Action Plan" by the principal or designee is developed and signed by the parent and child.

On the 10th unexcused absence, a Truancy Referral Packet is completed and the "truancy referral process" beyond the building level will begin. The Corrective Action Plan is reviewed and modified as needed.

If absent, students must make up work. Arrangements for making up work must be established with the teacher upon the return of the student. If work is not made up, it may result in lowering the grade. The class work must be made up within a specific time period equaling one day make-up per one day absence. In case of a pre-arranged absence, the class work is due the next day. All work not made up within the time limit will be graded zero (0). Extenuating circumstances, however, may be considered in extending the time for make-up.

Students must report to school on time each day. A written note must accompany all tardies and/or early dismissals.

After the 5th tardy/early dismissal, the parent/guardian will be notified by the principal/designee.

After the 10th tardy/early dismissal, a Corrective Action Plan will be developed by the Student Intervention Team or Attendance Committee and signed by the parent/guardian and student.

After the 15th tardy/early dismissal, the Corrective Action Plan will be reviewed and amended as determined by the Student Intervention Team or Attendance Committee and signed by the parent and student. The School Social Worker may be a member of this committee.

After the 20th tardy/early dismissal, a Truancy Referral packet will be developed and the truancy referral process will begin. A third Corrective Action Plan may be reviewed and amended.

Absences for disciplinary reasons will count under this policy and are recorded as unexcused absences. A Corrective Action Plan may be developed when a student is absent 10 or more days for disciplinary reasons.

Doctor and dental appointments should be arranged before or after school when possible. If the medical appointment is urgent and must take place during the school day, a doctor's note is required upon return of the student to school.

Student Intervention Team / Truancy Referral Process

In the case of extenuating circumstances, a written request to the principal/designee at the school is required. The principal/designee will hold a meeting of the building's Student Intervention Team or Attendance Committee to make further determination. The school social worker may be a member of the Attendance Committee or Student Intervention Team. The decision of the Student Intervention Team or Attendance Committee is final.

When the "truancy referral process" begins, the Truancy Referral Packet is completed at the building-level and referred to a social worker/school resource officer/administrative team to conduct a home visit. As a part of this visit, every effort is made to have the parent to sign another "Corrective Action Plan." This may be a review of the current "Corrective Action Plan" with changes or modifications.

The completed Truancy Referral Packet is submitted to the office of the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer. A conference is scheduled with the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer, parent, student, principal/designee and the school social worker. An additional "Corrective Action Plan" may be developed and signed.

If the student is absent or tardy/has an early dismissal 3 additional days (excused or unexcused for absences) after the conference with the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer, an update is sent from the principal/designee and the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer will schedule a meeting with the Hampton Court Service Unit.

The meeting with the Hampton Court Service Unit will involve the principal/designee, the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer, the school social worker and a senior probation officer. At this meeting the parent and student will be required to sign an "Intake Diversion Plan."

If the student is absent or tardy/has an early dismissal 3 additional days after this meeting without a doctor's note, an update will be sent to the school-court liaison/pupil accountability officer and a CHINS (Children in Need of Supervision) petition and/or a Parent Participation Order will be filed. If a child is found to be truant, notification is required to the Department of Social Services for consideration of those families receiving TANF grants.

After the court process of a CHINS and/or Parent Participation Order is completed and the student continues to be absent, a warrant can be sworn against the parent for "Contributing To The Delinquency of a Minor." (This is a criminal offense that can result in a fine and/or confinement)

The aforementioned steps are required related to tenets of the Compulsory Attendance Laws in the state of Virginia.

NOTE: The school social worker is an important component to a successful home and school connection. The School Social Worker may be invited into the process at any point as deemed necessary by the principal.



ROANOKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
5937 Cove Road
Roanoke, VA 24019
(540) 562-3700

Attendance Improvement Support Services

CHRONIC ILLNESS VERIFICATION FORM

Student: _____ DOB: ____/____/____

Grade: _____

Forward To (School): _____ Fax Number: _____

Dear Physician:

Your patient is a student enrolled in Roanoke County Public School District. For our records, please list the chronic illness diagnosed for the student. Also, please check or list symptoms that would not warrant an office visit, but might require the child to stay home from school. This will allow the parent to verify illnesses, by listing in writing to the school the symptoms designated below, without bringing the child to your office for an examination. This document expires at the end of the academic year it was received.

*Physician Signature: _____ Date: _____

*Note: An attached business card or letterhead is required.

PHYSICIAN VERIFICATION

Chronic Illness/Medical Diagnosis: _____

Symptom(s): _____

Expected frequency _____ of episodes and length of absence per episode _____ day(s). (i.e., monthly, 4 times per school year)

<u>Neurological System</u>	<u>Respiratory System</u>	<u>Gastrointestinal System</u>	<u>Cardiovascular System</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> lethargy	<input type="checkbox"/> weakness/fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> nausea/vomiting	<input type="checkbox"/> weakness/dizziness
<input type="checkbox"/> dizziness/unsteadiness	<input type="checkbox"/> pallor/cyanosis	<input type="checkbox"/> diarrhea	<input type="checkbox"/> pallor/cyanosis
<input type="checkbox"/> numbness in extremities	<input type="checkbox"/> continual coughing	<input type="checkbox"/> constipation	<input type="checkbox"/> palpitations
<input type="checkbox"/> petit mal seizures	<input type="checkbox"/> congested airway	<input type="checkbox"/> abdominal pain	<input type="checkbox"/> rapid pulse
<input type="checkbox"/> grand mal seizures	<input type="checkbox"/> difficulty breathing		<input type="checkbox"/> arrhythmia
<input type="checkbox"/> severe headache	<input type="checkbox"/> pain		<input type="checkbox"/> pain
<input type="checkbox"/> blurred vision			<input type="checkbox"/> fevers/infections
<u>Genitourinary System</u>	<u>Musculoskeletal System</u>	<u>Ear, Nose and Throat</u>	<u>Integumentary System</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> bladder/kidney infection	<input type="checkbox"/> pain	<input type="checkbox"/> chronic infections	<input type="checkbox"/> skin lesions
<input type="checkbox"/> fever	<input type="checkbox"/> inflammation/swelling	<input type="checkbox"/> severe allergies	<input type="checkbox"/> infections
	<input type="checkbox"/> fever	<input type="checkbox"/> severe asthma	<input type="checkbox"/> edema
		<input type="checkbox"/> pneumonia/bronchitis	

Additional Comments: _____

To: **Physician's Name:** _____ **Physician's Address:** _____

I hereby request and authorize the exchange of information on the above diagnosis pertaining to my child between Health Services designated staff of the Roanoke County Public School District and _____ (physician's name).

I request Roanoke County Public School District to contact the parent/guardian signing this authorization before contacting the authorizing medical professional. ____ (initial here to request) This contact will only be made if the frequency or length of absences exceeds the numbers authorized above. **I further understand with this verification, I must submit written explanations to verify each absence.**

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

NOTE: Shaded areas and appropriate symptoms must be filled in for form to be valid.

APPENDIX C PREVENTION INFORMATION

Sample Attendance Improvement Program

Excerpt from Newport News Public Schools

Keeping Kids in School (KKIS)

WHAT IS KKIS?

Truancy is a major issue facing communities across the country. For this reason, the Newport News City Council and the Newport News Public School Board have created a campaign called Keeping Kids in School (KKIS).

KKIS is a community effort to improve regular school attendance.

Important Facts

The City of Newport News and Newport News Public Schools are working together to INCREASE regular school attendance. Keeping Kids in School is a community effort to encourage regular school attendance.

- In the 1999-2000 school year, 28% of the total Newport News Public School population skipped school 5 or more times. They had 5 or more UNEXCUSED absences.
- Truancy begins in kindergarten. Absences in kindergarten and elementary school set the pattern for how often a child will or will not attend school in later years.
- The more years of education youth complete, the more money they will probably earn as adults and the better their chances will be of getting and keeping a good job.
- Truancy is against the law! State law gives school officials the ability to turn to the courts to help decrease truancy. Check the NNPS Rights and Responsibilities Handbook for the attendance policy or call Newport News Public Schools at 591-4545 for more information.

A community partnership that keeps kids learning

It's an obvious fact: if children are not in school, their academic performance suffers. To reduce the truancy rate, a community wide initiative called Keeping Kids in School or KKIS is working with parents, students, schools and businesses to make sure young people are in school on time, every day. Through activities at local businesses, posters in schools and businesses, advertisements and articles in local papers, Keeping Kids in School hopes to promote the value of education and bring together the entire community to improve school attendance.

A KKIS partnership agreement asks families to make sure their children are absent only for excused reasons, to support activities that promote school attendance, attend parent conferences and PTA meetings, and schedule family outings and activities so that they do not conflict with school schedules.

Business support is essential to the KKIS program. Besides providing mentors for students with attendance problems and incentives for good attendance, business sponsors can pledge to use school attendance as a yardstick for employability and to establish working hours that do not interfere with school attendance and academic performance.

To find out how your business can help promote school attendance, call Newport News Public Schools at 591-4545 or the Newport News Office on Youth Development at 597-2801.

Keeping Kids in School (KKIS)

To Parents and Students

Teachers, principals and other educators are working hard to help students succeed in school. But they can't do it alone. Going to school and learning takes effort from parents and teachers, too.

PARENTS, you're in the best position to help your children understand the benefits of regular school attendance. You can help by:

- Encouraging your children to go to school regularly. Talk with your children about their future education and career goals. Help them map out which courses they will need to get there. Make sure your children understand why it's important to go to school.
- Making sure your own words and actions send a positive message about school.
- Becoming involved with your child's school activities. Students develop positive attitudes about school when their parents take an active interest in their studies and attend school activities.
- Making clear that school is the number one priority for young people. Make sure your children's academics receive high priority.

See the Family Partnership Agreement

STUDENTS, attending school every day has rewarding benefits:

- If you LEARN more, you'll EARN more.
- What you learn now lasts a LIFETIME!!
- School encourages friendships.
- School challenges you to reach for your dreams.
- Teachers dare you to achieve and are proud of your success.
- School shows you the way to success in your future.
- School is a place for fun activities like sports and clubs.
- Knowledge can improve your quality of life.

Young people who attend school and study more learn more. Most successful people got where they are through hard work. School is the same way!

Keeping Kids in School (KKIS)

Business Partnership Program

Truancy is a major issue facing communities across the country. For this reason, Newport News Public Schools and the City of Newport News have created the Keeping Kids in School campaign. The KKIS Task Force has developed a community strategy to improve regular school attendance. By becoming a business partner, your company endorses the importance of regular school attendance.

How Can Businesses and Employees Benefit?

- Good school attendance promotes academic success that leads to a qualified and competent work force.
- Education improves the quality of life for members of the community.

What Can Businesses Do to Help?

- Promote the importance of regular school attendance by disseminating information to employees and customers.
- Partner with a school to provide mentors for students with attendance problems and/or offer incentives and awards to recognize student and faculty efforts to improve individual or group attendance.
- Provide financial assistance for promotional efforts to educate students and parents on the importance of regular school attendance.
- Cooperate in efforts to identify students who may be truant by reporting students who are in businesses during school hours.
- Utilize school attendance as a measure for assessing reliability of students hired for summer and part-time employment opportunities.
- Establish working hours for student employees that do not interfere with school attendance and academic performance.
- Provide recognition for student employees and/or children of employees for good or improved school attendance.
- Display the Keeping Kids in School emblem in your business to show your support.

For more information and to become a business partner, contact Newport News Public Schools at (757) 591-4545 or the Newport News Office on Youth Development at (757) 597-2801.

Keeping Kids in School (KKIS)

Family Partnership Agreement

The *Keeping Kids in School* Initiative has been created as a strategy for the community to work together to improve regular school attendance. It is important that families recognize that regular school attendance is fundamental to assuring academic success and for producing the positive productive citizens of tomorrow. As a partner, your family is pledging to support measures for improving school attendance and expressing your willingness to participate in the *Keeping Kids in School Community Initiative*. You are also committing to cooperate with the City of Newport News and Newport News Public Schools to increase regular school attendance and reduce truancy.

AGREEMENT

My family agrees to do all of the following:

- Insure that our students are absent for only legitimate excused reasons.
- Provide a note each and every time that my child or student in my home is absent from school.
- Support school activities and initiatives designed to promote regular school attendance.
- Attend all parent conferences.
- Attend PTA meetings.
- Schedule family outings and activities to insure they do not conflict with school schedules.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____ FAX: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Authorized Signatures: _____ Date: _____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

If more signature lines are needed, please continue on the back of the form.

Examples of Alternative School Programs in Fairfax County, Virginia

Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia) offers a broad array of alternative school programs including alternative high schools, alternative learning centers, programs for students with behavioral issues, and interagency schools. Examples of these alternative school programs are as follows:

Alternative High Schools

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) supports three alternative high schools. These schools offer credit courses leading to a FCPS high school diploma. The schools offer programs designed to help students whose life circumstances could result or have resulted in an interruption of their education or in their dropping out of school. The population consists of students who may be pregnant or parenting, students for whom English is a second language, older students who are returning to finish courses to earn a diploma, or students who need a flexible or extended program to accommodate their work or family requirements. In addition, the alternative high schools accept students who are based at another school and wish to accelerate their educational program.

The **Landmark Career Academy** associated with one alternative high school is a FCPS/business community partnership located in a shopping mall. It offers highly motivated students a unique opportunity to complete a high school diploma, learn about the business world, and gain entry employment or college acceptance upon graduation. Specialized training is designed to combine school-based and work-based components to develop employment skills and opportunities.

Project Opportunity, located at one alternative high school, is a program that provides young women who are pregnant or parenting with the opportunity to complete their high school education and gain marketable skills. The students are offered group and individual counseling, parenting classes, day care assistance, transportation, mentor program, grandparent involvement, and other support services.

Alternative Learning Centers

The Alternative Learning Center (ALC) is designed to provide continued educational opportunities in core classes for students in grade six through ten who have been involved in serious disciplinary incidents. Courses and learning objectives meet expectations as defined by the Virginia Standards of Learning. All required testing, i.e. SOL, administered in base schools will be administered at the ALC. Credits earned at the ALC will be transferred to the student's cumulative transcript. Consideration for re-entry into a base school will be contingent on each student's successful completion of all Fairfax County School Board and ALC program requirements (attendance, academic effort, and behavior)

There is one elementary ALC that provides instruction in combination with the Summit Program that provides intensive behavioral and academic interventions to build responsibility, positive relationships, and resiliency in students.

There are three secondary ALC sites. The program offers a four and one-half hour day. Students are able to enroll in on-line coursework if skills and ability are sufficient to pursue additional coursework. Some summer school coursework is also available.

Computer Enhanced Instruction Program

The Computer Enhanced Instruction (CEI) Program provides instruction at the middle and high school level to two distinct populations of FCPS students:

- Special education students placed on administrative home-based instruction pending a hearing due to disciplinary concerns, or awaiting placement in a long-term instructional program such as the Alternative Learning Center

-
- Students who have been excluded or expelled by the School Board who are not eligible to attend other schools or centers.

This program uses two distance learning programs as the framework for instruction, coupled with supplemental texts and materials that enhance the learning experience. Based on academic assessment, some capable students who demonstrate the required skills and motivation to succeed may be enrolled in regular FCPS on-line coursework, following all procedures and policies as option one. As a second option, other students who require more supportive instruction with remediation or ESOL assistance will be enrolled in NovaNet, a comprehensive on-line learning system offered by Pearson Education Technologies. NovaNet is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning requirements and has been used extensively in several alternative schools, credit recovery programs, homebound programs, and homeschooling. The program provides self-paced, standards-based courseware in grades 1-12, including ESOL skill development, GED preparation, and School-To-Work preparation courses. Many of these students have serious learning deficits that necessitate customized instruction programs designed to remediate gaps in content knowledge and experience. The NovaNet management and recordkeeping system allows teachers to work with each student at their own level. Teachers are able to manage, monitor, evaluate, and report on individual and group progress alike.

Interagency Alternative Schools

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) provides staff, materials, and program direction to 31 school programs located at sites administered and funded by other public agencies. These alternative schools offer an education program for disruptive or disaffected youth who have not been successful in traditional school settings. Through the use of success oriented teaching methods and materials, small class size, and a structured environment, these programs facilitate the students' positive growth and development in both academic and social skills. Each school is specifically designed to meet the needs of the student population of the host agency. Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, including Alcohol and Drug Services and Mental Health Services, the Virginia Department of Education, and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, in partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools, provide comprehensive services to youth who require intensive assistance and often long-term interventions. Students served in these schools have exhibited problems in the following areas: truancy, serious delinquency, poor school performance, substance abuse, criminal behavior, abuse and neglect, school refusal, conditional expulsion, and family dysfunction.

Summit Program

The primary purpose of the Summit Program is to provide intensive behavioral and academic interventions to build responsibility, positive relationships, and resiliency in students, grades kindergarten through eleven, who have been unsuccessful in their base school due to behavior problems. There are three goals to meet this primary purpose. Goal one is to provide an effective higher order intervention to decrease disruptions to the on-going base school program and for continuity with early intervention, prevention, and school capacity programs. A second goal is to provide the student individualized services based on researched best practices in academic instruction and positive approaches to behavior management. The third goal of the program is to maintain connection to the student's base school and provide an effective transition back to the base school or appropriate program.

The Summit Program is an eighteen-week intervention designed to intervene in the area of problems behaviors while offering an appropriate academic program. The low student to teacher ratio and separate classrooms also allow for an individualized approach. After the student's placement of eighteen weeks, the students are returned to their base school, or possibly may be referred to another alternative setting, if necessary. Because this is a relatively short intervention, collaborative transition planning is critical. At the placement meeting, the referring school staff and the Summit staff will develop an individualized instructional plan (IIP) based on the student's specific needs.

APPENDIX D KEY RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Organizations

The Ad Council: High School Dropout Prevention

http://www.adcouncil.org/research/wga/high_school_dropout_prevention/?issue3Menu

Alternative Education Resource Organization

<http://www.educationrevolution.org/>

American Indian Education: Plans for Dropout Prevention and Special School Support Services for American Indian and Alaska Native Students

<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/INAR.html>

Center for Adolescent Health and Development

<http://allaboutkids.umn.edu/cfahad/>

Communities in Schools

<http://www.cisnet.org/>

International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention

<http://www.iatdp.org>

Join Together Online

<http://www.jointogether.org/home/>

National Center for School Engagement

<http://www.truancyreduction.org>

Truancy Reduction Program Database – Program Registry - <http://truancyreductionregistry.civicore.com/>

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

<http://training.ncjfcj.org/truancy.htm>

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>

National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk

<http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/>

National Mentoring Partnership

<http://www.mentoring.org/>

National School Safety Center

<http://www.nsscl.org/>

National Truancy Prevention Association

<http://www.truancycourts.org>

National Youth Court Center
<http://www.youthcourt.net/default.htm>

No Child Left Behind
<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html>

Operation: Graduation
<http://www.operationgraduation.com/>

Social Development Research Group
<http://depts.washington.edu/sdrg/>

Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/grants/grantprograms/discr08.html>

The Urban Institute
<http://www.urban.org>

Vera Institute for Justice
<http://www.vera.org/>

Evidence-Based Prevention Programs

Check & Connect

<http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

<http://www.idra.org/ccvyp/default.htm>

Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline Program

<http://www.coe.uh.edu/cmcd/default.cfm>

King County Superior Court Truancy Reduction Program/The Becca Bill

<http://www.metrokc.gov/kcsc/juv/truancy.htm>

Sacramento City Unified School District: Truancy Reduction and Dropout Prevention Program

http://www.scusd.edu/sfss/standards_of_behavior/trdp_4.htm

School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Biennial/95-96/eval/129-97.pdf>

School Dropout Prevention Program

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html>

The START (School Tardiness and Attendance Review Team) Program

Christine Shaw, Truancy Prevention Program Coordinator, (617) 679-6555

<http://www.projectalliance.org/>

Louisville Truancy Court Diversion Program
Jefferson County Family Court
Judicial Center
700 West Jefferson Street, Suite 220
Louisville, KY 40202-4730
Judge Joan Byer (joanb@mail.aoc.state.ky.us)

Federal Program Review Web Sites

Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence
www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/panel.html?exp=0

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/

National Program Review Reports

Choosing the Tools: A Review of Selected K-12 Health Education Curricula
notes.edc.org/HHD/products.nsf/products/87

Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings of Positive Youth Development Programs
aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/PositiveYouthDev99/index.htm

Preventing Mental Disorders in School-Age Children: A Review of the Effectiveness of Prevention Programs
www.prevention.psu.edu/CMHSxs.htm

Resilience: Status of the Research and Research-Based Programs
www.mentalhealth.org/schoolviolence/5-28resilience.asp

Safe and Sound: An Education Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs
www.casel.org/progrevfr.htm

Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies
www.drugstrategies.org/

School Health: Findings from Evaluated Programs
www.ashaweb.org/

Publications

The following list was compiled by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE). An even more comprehensive annotated bibliography is available on the NCSE Web site at <http://www.truancyprevention.org>

Truancy Statistics

Dekalb, J. (1999, April). Student truancy. *ERIC Digest*, ERIC Clearinghouse On Educational Management, n. 125.

This short article discusses the extent of the truancy problem in a few major city school districts, the consequences of failure to attend school, and some of the causes of truancy. It briefly lists the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals for creating successful attendance policies. A few hard-line policies and a few community programs are described also.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community. *Journal of Education Research*, 95(5), 308-320.

This paper reports the findings of a study called "Focus on Results - Study of Student Attendance" conducted during the 1996-1997 school year by the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University. Results are reported for 12 elementary schools in Maryland, California, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, all of which had implemented family and community activities designed to improve attendance. The schools were successful in improving average daily attendance by 0.71 percent and the average percentage of chronically absent students from 8 percent to 6.1 percent over a two-year span. Coordinators of the partnership programs at each school completed three surveys during the school year. They rated the perceived effectiveness of seven activities at improving attendance, giving 'home visits' the highest rating. They also ranked their own effectiveness at communicating with parents. The authors performed correlations between these rankings and rates of daily attendance, chronic absenteeism, and changes in those rates over time. Some activities were found to improve both attendance measures, while others improved either one or the other. The article includes a review of literature linking attendance to dropping out of high school.

Garry, E. (1996, October). Truancy: First step to a lifetime of problems. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

This bulletin briefly describes seven truancy reduction programs nationwide including some data on program results, and program contact information. The programs take a wide variety of approaches including sanctions against parents, allowing police to detain juveniles, parenting classes, social worker supervision, counseling, and home visits. The programs are: 1) Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education in Oklahoma City; 2) At School, On Time, Ready to Work in Chanute, KS; 3) Project Helping Hand in Atlantic City, NJ; 4) Truancy and Curfew Violation Center in Ramsey County, MN; 5) Truancy Reduction Program in Kern County, CA; 6) The Save Kids Partnership in Maricopa County, AZ; 7) Daytime Curfew Program in Roswell, NM.

Mulrine, A. (2001, September 10). The kindergarten of crime. *U.S. News & World Report*, 51.

This brief news report provides some startling statistics on the attendance problem in a few major urban areas, and some of the consequences school districts and courts are using to combat the problem. It has a little information about the link between truancy and crime, and between truancy and achievement in a few neighborhoods. Some interesting data, no review of literature or study reports.

U.S. Department of Education in Cooperation with the U.S Department of Justice. (1996, July). *Manual To Combat Truancy*. Retrieved November 13, 2002 from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Truancy>.

The U.S. Department of Education collaborated with the U.S. Department of Justice was written to develop this manual to address the problem of truancy. At the time of the writing of this article there was not a lot of national data on truancy, but the article cites local statistics on truancy trends in different cities. A "Users Guide" to

detering truancy is then given, that includes parental involvement, firm sanctions for truants, meaningful incentives for youth and parents, ongoing school-based prevention programs, and involvement of law enforcement. Finally, selected model truancy programs are described.

Wilson K. (1993). Tough on truants. *American School Board Journal*, 180, 43-46.

The superintendent of the Tulsa County schools in OK describes changes in school attendance that occurred when the schools began uniformly sending truants to court. The article includes descriptions of eight steps needed to create an effective court system. She claims the first 200 court cases resulted in 400 students returning to school. The 648 cases files between 11/89 and 8/92 resulted in a 45% reduction in the dropout rate, and a drop in daytime crime. OK law requires school attendance until age 18, and the court imposes fines for truancy.

Truancy Prevention

Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001, September). *Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school*, OJJDP.

This bulletin is primarily an extensive review of two truancy reduction programs: ACT Now in Pima County, AZ, and the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program operating in seven sites nationwide. The review includes thorough descriptions of both projects, and evaluation results. The introduction includes statistics on truancy and court involvement with truants and a literature review on truancy as a predictor of delinquency. Four correlates of truancy are identified: family factors, school factors, economic influences, and student variables.

Beem, K. (2002). Eliminating dropouts with persistence and shoe leather: This small school district took on its truancy problem head-on. Its result: No dropouts. *District Administration*, 38(6), 18-19.

Kentucky's Walton-Verona school district has achieved a 100% graduation rate for three years in a row as a result of a truancy reduction program called Schools and Families Empowered (SAFE) in which about 60 students participate currently. The district is a small suburban two-school district in a mostly middle class area; however, about 1/5 of the students qualify for free and reduced meals. The overall state graduation rate is 66%. Test scores have risen as well.

Berger, W. B., & Wind, S. (2000). Police eliminating truancy: A PET project. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 69(2), 16-19.

A truancy reduction program in the Miami area is described in this bulletin. Truants are picked up by law enforcement officers who assess the reasons for truancy at a Truancy Evaluation Center (TEC). If it is the first time being truant the youth is returned to school. If they are out because of a suspension, they are enrolled in Alternative to Suspension Program (ASP). If they are found to be habitually truant, a meeting is held with parents and counselor to identify the problems and resolve them. The article attributes a reduction in daytime crime in part to the PET project.

Coordinating Council On Juvenile Justice And Delinquency Prevention. (1996, March). *Combating violence and delinquency: The National Juvenile Justice Action Plan*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Juvenile Justice Action Plan provides a summary of the problem of juvenile delinquency and violence, and its various chapters each focus on a different strategy for addressing the problem. Chapter 4 is entitled "Provide Opportunities for Children and Youth". It cites truancy as a major problem in many urban centers and links it to juvenile delinquency. It reviews a number of community-based programs that are designed to reduce truancy, and provides citations for program information.

Dekalb, J. (1999, April). Student Truancy. *ERIC Digest*, ERIC Clearinghouse On Educational Management, n. 125.

This short review article discusses the extent of the truancy problem in a few major city school districts, the consequences of failure to attend school, and some of the causes of truancy. It briefly lists the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals for creating successful attendance policies. A few hard-line policies and a few community programs are described, as well.

D'Orio, W. (2002). Holding parents accountable for truants. *District Administration*, 38(10), 11.

This is a four-paragraph statement of Chicago's plan to hold parents accountable by requiring them to attend parenting classes, receive counseling, or, in the extreme, face arrest.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community. *Journal of Education Research*, 95(5), 308-320.

This paper reports the findings of a study called "Focus on Results - Study of Student Attendance" conducted during the 1996-1997 school year by the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University. Results are reported for 12 elementary schools in MD, CA, MN, and PA, all of which had implemented family and community activities designed to improve attendance. The schools were successful in improving average daily attendance by 0.71% and the average percentage of chronically absent students from 8% to 6.1% over a 2-year span. Coordinators of the partnership programs at each school completed three surveys during the school year. They rated the perceived effectiveness of seven activities at improving attendance, giving 'home visits' the highest rating. They also ranked their own effectiveness at communicating with parents. The authors performed correlations between these rankings and rates of daily attendance, chronic absenteeism, and changes in those rates over time. Some activities were found to improve both attendance measures, while others improved either one or the other. The article includes a literature review linking attendance to dropping out of high school.

Garry, E. (1996, October). Truancy: First step to a lifetime of problems. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

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Gavin, T. (1997). Truancy: Not just kids' stuff anymore. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 66, 8-14.

This article describes in detail a truancy reduction center run by the St. Petersburg, FL police department with the intent of reducing daytime burglary. When the police pick up a truant youth, they bring him/her to the truancy center staffed by a juvenile officer and a teacher. Parents are called in to pick up their children and take them to school. This article provides suggestions for ways police departments can work with state statutes to develop reasonable truancy policies, and ways they can work with community agencies. The introduction provides interesting historical citations going back over a century to the link between truancy and delinquency.

Gullatt, D. & Lemoine, D. A. (1997). Truancy: What's a principal to do? *American Secondary Education*, 26, 7-12.

The author groups solutions to reducing truancy into four main categories and gives examples of each from around the country and internationally. First, stringent laws and regulations including fines for parents, zero-credit for absent students, school suspensions, and police interventions. Second, in-school programs include developing attendance policies, involving parents, providing guidance, and providing alternative programs. Third, the experiences of a number of districts that use computer telephoning systems to notify parents of their children's absences are related. Fourth, two community programs designed to provide services to truant youths are discussed. The article concludes with a list of school, teacher, family, and student responsibilities.

Haslinger, J., Kelly, P., & O'Lare, L. (1996). Counting absenteeism, anonymity and apathy. *Educational Leadership*, 54(1), 47-49.

Staff members from one low-income, racially diverse elementary school in southern Maryland describe their intensive efforts to successfully reduce absenteeism. Many specific policies that could be replicated elsewhere are described.

McGiboney, G. (2001, March). Truants welcome here: An alternative school designed specially for truants is boosting student attendance. *American School Board Journal*, 43-45.

This article describes an alternative school for truant student only (not those were expelled for behavioral reasons) in DeKalb County, GA. Enrollment was 51 at the time of the writing. A full-day program, with curriculum designed to meet the special needs of truant students is offered. Although the per-pupil cost is higher than average, the results are striking - a 97% attendance rate.

Mogulescu, S. & H. J. Segal (2002). *Approaches to truancy prevention*. Vera Institute of Justice.

This paper describes seven truancy-specific programs identified by the Youth Justice Program as part of their effort to learn about effective approaches to truancy prevention. The programs fall into one of three categories: Prevention and Early Intervention; Alternatives to Filing a PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) Petition -- Diversion from Family Court; After a PINS Petition has been Filed -- Alternative Court Sanctions. All the programs functioned in a collaborative, multi-agency fashion and aimed to keep kids in school by providing services and support systems. The latter should minimize reliance on the juvenile justice system.

Nessel, P. A. (1999). Teen courts and law-related education. *ERIC Digest*. (Report No. EDO-SO-1999-2). Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429031)

This brief article describes four models of school-based courts used as voluntary alternatives to juvenile court for status offenses and minor cases of delinquency. The courts offer law-related education to teens who serve as jurors, defense council, and sometimes judges. Some evidence indicates youths sentenced by teen courts have lower rates of recidivism.

Reglin, G. L. (1997, July/August). Mentoring and tutoring help (MATH) program fights truancy. *The Clearing House*, 70, 319-324.

The Truancy Court Conference Program is a community effort enlisting courts, a partnering agency, and schools, which was established in 1993 in Florida. The article describes the continuum of interventions provided by the program from the process of identifying the truant youth, an invitation to parents and youth to a voluntary conference held with a judge, a meeting with the lead agency (usually a counseling center), and finally a case management meeting to determine if additional services are needed or if a CINS (Child In Need of Services) petition should be filed with the court for unimproved attendance. The article goes on to describe the MATH Program (Mentoring and Tutoring Help), which is a year-long curriculum that links truants with mentors in the community. The article cites facts and outcomes from the MATH program and provides steps for replication.

Riley, P. & McDaniel, J. (1999, September). Youth out of the education mainstream: A North Carolina profile. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

This paper reviews North Carolina's experience with the Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) initiative. Ten alternative YOEM schools had been opened since 1997. The schools are attended by students who had difficulties in at least one of five categories: 1) fear of attending school, 2) suspensions and expulsions, 3) truancy, 4) dropping out, and 5) students who were reintegrated from juvenile justice settings. In order to encourage truant students to attend school more regularly, several YOEM schools provided transportation to and from school, and others initiated extended hours so that students' work schedules could be accommodated. The

schools also implemented systems of positive reinforcement, issuing awards, and holding banquets for successful students. Ten lessons learned about implementation are included.

Swope, C. (1995). Tracking down truants. *Governing*, 8, 52-53.

The author reviews the experiences of several US school jurisdictions as they tried tough approaches to reducing truancy. Programs discussed in the article include Milwaukee's Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Centers (TABS), the practice of sentencing parents to attend school with their children in Paterson NJ, and Wisconsin's Learnfare program, that docks the welfare payments of habitually truant teens, among others. The drawbacks of tough programs are also discussed.

Tischelle, G. (2002, April 4). Battling truancy with wireless devices: Wireless technology may make it harder for students in Boston to play hooky. *Information Week*.

A four-paragraph description of new technology that will allow Boston's attendance officers to access truant students' attendance records from wireless phones while in the field. The system will replace the huge paper printouts the officers carried previously.

Twaite, J. A., & Lampert, D. T. (1997). Outcomes of mandated preventive services programs for homeless and truant children: A follow-up study. *Social Work*, 42(1), 11-18.

Two mandated preventive programs, the Homeless Families Project and the Truancy Diversion Program were studied to determine the following as five predictors of successful outcomes: intensity of parental involvement in the program, parental attendance, severity of child's pathology, parental understanding of child's pathology, and the extent to which parents provided their child with adequate structure, stimulation, and warmth. One hundred case files were reviewed and rated by social workers on these predictors. Criterion measures included compliance with termination plans and the child's adjustment six months after termination. Results indicated that the criterion measures were significantly correlated with four of the predictive factors.

U.S. Department of Education in Cooperation with the U.S Department of Justice. (1996, July). *Manual to combat truancy*. Retrieved November 13, 2002 from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Truancy>.

The US Department of Education collaborated with the US Department of Justice to develop this manual to address the problem of truancy. At the time of the writing of this article there was not a lot of national data on truancy, but the article cites local statistics on truancy trends in different cities. A "Users Guide" to deterring truancy is then given, that includes parental involvement, firm sanctions for truants, meaningful incentives for youth and parents, ongoing school-based prevention programs, and involvement of law enforcement. Finally, selected model truancy programs are described.

White, M. D., Fyfe, J. J., Campbell, S. P. & Goldkamp, J. S. (2001). The school-police partnership: Identifying at-risk youth through a truant recovery program. *Evaluation Review*, 25(5), 507-532.

This study is based on a random sample of 178 youths who were picked up in truancy sweeps by the Richmond, CA police department in the Fall semester of 1997 and brought to the police-school Truant Recovery Program in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. The program has several key components. Truant youths are picked up by the police and taken to the Student Welfare and Attendance Office, from which their parents are called to attend a meeting. Students may be sent to a School Attendance Review Board, or to the Suspension Alternative Class. The study is descriptive in nature; there is no control group, and it is not intended to be an evaluation of the Truancy Recovery Program. The authors compare school attendance, grades, disciplinary incidents, and contact with the police during the 3 years prior to the truancy sweep, with the 1.5 years afterward. In general, the students picked up in the sweep were struggling. They have missed many days of school, have below-average grades, and 7% had been arrested prior to the sweep, despite a median age of 15. Improvement was seen in school attendance and behavioral incidents after program participation, but grades remained about the same, and numbers of arrests increased.

Wilson K. (1993). Tough on truants. *American School Board Journal*, 180, 43-46.

The superintendent of the Tulsa County schools in OK describes changes in school attendance that occurred when the schools began uniformly sending truants to court. The article includes descriptions of eight steps needed to create an effective court system. She claims the first 200 court cases resulted in 400 students returning to school. The 648 cases files between 11/89 and 8/92 resulted in a 45% reduction in the dropout rate, and a drop in daytime crime. OK law requires school attendance until age 18, and the court imposes fines for truancy.

Truancy Intervention

American Bar Association. (2001). *Truancy, literacy and the courts: A user's manual for setting up a truancy intervention program*. Washington, DC: ABA.

Manual features several truancy intervention programs and provides guidelines for developing such programs.

Bage, M. (1989). Five agencies close ranks to help kids avoid truancy. *Executive Educator*, 11(2), 16-17.

Bage provides a description of the impetus for and the process of forming a multiagency coalition to deal with truancy in the Hopewell (Virginia) Public Schools. The author presents 3 instances in which the process has made an identifiable difference by providing agencies, particularly the court, more information on which to base decisions.

Bell, A. J., Rosen, L. A., & Dynlacht, D. (1994). Truancy intervention. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 27(3), 203-211.

This article is a review of papers published between 1975 and 1991 regarding the psychopathology of truant behavior, implications of truancy and truancy interventions. The authors concluded that intervention effectiveness could be increased by using a multimodal approach that targets the student, the school and the family. They describe what a model program might look like.

Jones, L. P., Harris, R., & Finnegan, D. (2002). School attendance demonstration project: An evaluation of a program to motivate public assistance teens to attend and complete school in an urban school district. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 12(2), 222-237.

This article reports the results of an evaluation of The School Attendance Demonstration Project (SADP), which was a collaboration of the San Diego County Department of Social Services and the San Diego Unified School District. The program focused on 16 to 18-year-olds who received Aid for Dependent Children. Youth were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group. Those in the experimental group were subjected to a financial penalty if their attendance fell below 80% minimum for 2 consecutive months and did not attend an orientation for services. Those in the control group were not financially penalized nor did they receive services. The difference in graduation rates (57.5% vs. 55.4%) was not significant. Analysis of data related to attendance found that 3% to 9% more experimental students met the attendance rule the months following the startup of the project. The analysis suggested that females, Hispanics and younger students had more difficulty meeting the 80% rule. Those in two parent households did better meeting the rule. There was also an indication that the extent of presenting problems negatively impacted attendance.

Kozinetz, C. A. (1995). Using administrative data to identify elementary schools at increased risk for student absences. *Journal Of School Health*, 65(5), 262-264.

This paper reports the results of a study done in Texas designed to examine the feasibility of using administrative databases in school-based research and to identify school-level variables associated with absence to help define health services and policy for schools. The unit of study for this project was the school. Correlations between the absence rate and mobility rate, percent African-American, percent approved for free/reduced lunch and percent eligible for exceptional education were positive; those between absence rate and percent promoted, percent

participating in gifted programs, percent white and percent bilingual were negative. The author concluded that it was possible to identify schools at-risk for high truancy to receive interventions.

Quinn, L. (1995). Using threats of poverty to promote school attendance: Implications of Wisconsin's Learnfare experiment for families. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 1(2), 5-16.

This article reports the results of an examination of the impact of Wisconsin's Learnfare experiment on the level of truancy of teenagers. Learnfare, initiated in 1987, denied Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to families whose teenagers are not regularly attending school. A study released in 1992, showed that there were no positive impacts on school attendance in any of the six school districts evaluated. Further, in the largest district, Milwaukee Public Schools, there was a measurable worsening of attendance.

Waddington, C. (1997). The use of legal proceedings in cases of non-attendance at school: Perceptions of education welfare officers. *Educational Research*, 39(3), 333-341.

This article is a description of the British process for prosecuting parents of non-attending students and the pilot study done to consider its use, particularly regarding the views and practices of the Education Welfare Officers who are responsible for initiating these actions. This is only part of their duties regarding their interactions with families and being involved in these legal proceedings were felt by some to have the potential for negatively impacting their more welfare-based work with these individuals. The decision to actually file is mostly subjective and a last resort when other interventions do not seem to be working. Perceptions were that threat of prosecution was more effective than actual prosecution, however, any improvement was short-lived.

Welsh, W. N., Jenkins, P. H., & Harris, P. (1999). Reducing minority overrepresentation In juvenile justice: Results of community based delinquency prevention in Harrisburg. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 36(1), 87-110.

This article reports the results of an evaluation of 5 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania community-based programs called Youth Enhancement Services (YES) designed to reduce arrest and rearrest rates for minority youth by addressing risk factors at the individual, group, family, school, and community levels. Effects on recidivism, academic performance, school dropout rates and truancy were examined in a quasi-experimental design comparing 3 program attendance groups (none, low, high). Data from the 5 centers were combined resulting in a sample of 191 youth. Analyses found reduced recidivism, but no improvement in GPA and short-lived improvement for dropout rates and truancy.

Prevention Programming

The following list was compiled by the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Drug Prevention and School Safety Program Coordinators (<http://www.k12coordinator.org>) to assist schools and communities in prevention programming.

Adler, L. & Gardner, S. (1994). *The Politics of Linking Schools and Social Services*. Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

This edited volume includes chapters on a wide array of factors affecting the implementation of school-linked services, including legal, financial, interpersonal, interagency, and organizational issues.

Borden, L. M. & Perkins, D. F. (1999). *Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self-Evaluation Tool*. *Journal of Extension*, 37 (2). Available online at <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/tt1.html>.

This self-evaluation tool, developed to assist existing and forming groups, allows groups to rate their collaboration on key factors, including goals, communication, sustainability, evaluation, political climate,

resources, catalysts, policies/laws/regulations, history, connectedness, leadership, community development, and understanding community.

Donaldson Jr., G. A. & Sanderson, D. R. (1996). *Working Together in Schools: A Guide for Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

This book offers guidance to teachers, principals, counselors, other school staff members, parents, and community members in building strong, productive working relationships. It describes seven different opportunities for collaboration in schools, as well as a four-phase developmental process for each type of collaboration. Concrete suggestions for effective collaboration are spread throughout the book, including sample ground rules for committees and ways to surface hidden agendas.

Epstein, J. L., Coates, L., Salinas, K. C., Sanders, M. G., & Simon, B. S. (1997). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

This handbook enables state, district, and school leaders to organize and implement positive and permanent programs of school, family, and community partnerships. It is designed to guide the work of teams consisting of principals, teachers, parents, and others. The information, forms, and activities will also help state and district leaders support, facilitate, and reward the work of their schools. The handbook's eight chapters offer step-by-step strategies to improve school-family-community connections.

Friend, M. & Cook, L. (1996). *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for Professionals (second edition)*. National Professional Resources, Inc.

This text describes how school professionals can develop the knowledge and skills they need for effective professional collaboration.

Harvard Family Research Project. *Evaluating Family/School Partnerships: Learning from Logic Models*. Available online at <http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp/family-school/html/logic.pdf>.

This brief offers a step-by-step approach for developing and using a logic model as a framework for a program or organization's evaluation. Its purpose is to provide a tool to guide evaluation processes and to facilitate practitioner and evaluator partnerships. Written primarily for program practitioners, this brief uses the example of a hypothetical family/school partnership program throughout the text to help the reader understand each of the steps described.

Hooper-Briar, K. & Lawson, H. A. (Eds.) (1996). *Expanding Partnerships for Vulnerable Children, Youth, and Families*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.

This book includes papers originally presented at a conference of the same name held in September 1994. Topics include setting agendas for change, bringing clients into the collaborative process, creating school-based human service systems, developing community-responsive universities, overcoming obstacles to interprofessional education and practice, working with the media, and setting policy changes in motion.

Kretzmann, J. P. & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.

This is practical guide to rebuilding troubled communities through a strategy called "asset-based community development." After briefly describing how many communities have come to be so devastated and why traditional strategies for improvement have often failed, this guide proceeds to outline strategies for developing community policies and activities based on the capacities, skills, and assets of lower-income people and their neighborhoods.

Melaville, A. & Blank, M. (1991). *What It Takes: Structuring Interagency Partnerships to Connect Children and Families with Comprehensive Services*. Washington, DC: Education and Human Services Consortium. ERIC Accession Number: ED330748.

This document describes factors that affect the success of collaborative efforts as determined through an analysis of 13 interagency initiatives that include the cooperation of a school with at least one human services agency. Guidelines for successful partnerships are offered, along with an inventory of questions to help agencies assess the need for partnerships, program descriptions, and a list of resource organizations.

National Parent Teacher Association (2000). *Building Successful Partnerships: A Guide to Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service. Available online at <http://www.pta.org/programs/bsp/book.htm>.

This book describes the benefits of parent involvement, the components of effective parent involvement programs, and how to implement the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (which include communicating, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision-making and advocacy, and collaborating with the community). The book offers field-tested strategies for overcoming barriers, reaching out to key participants, and developing an effective parent involvement program.

Partnership for Family Involvement, U.S. Department of Education. *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Compact/>.

This guidebook and its activity sheets engage partners in a continuous improvement process to build and strengthen partnerships for learning. The guidebook can help teams of school staff, teachers, parents, and others develop and use a compact that outlines the shared responsibilities of school partners for children's learning.

Sensiper, S. *Generating Family-School Partnerships Through Social Marketing*. Harvard Family Research Project. Available online at <http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp/family-school/html/sensiper.htm>.

This article describes social marketing principles and shows how they apply to family-school partnerships. The paper proposes that a formal introduction to the principles of social marketing can benefit those involved in such efforts. The seven principles outlined by Alan Andreason (*Marketing Social Change*, 1995) are used as a framework.

Shartrand, A. M., Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H. M., & Lopez, M. E. (1997). *New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement*. Harvard Family Research Project. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NewSkills/>.

This report begins with a discussion of the importance of family involvement in children's schooling and the need to prepare teachers to promote this involvement. It then examines the status of teacher preparation, providing analyses of state certification requirements and teacher education programs. A framework for teacher preparation in family involvement highlights content areas and promising training methods. This section is followed by a set of recommendations to advance teacher preparation in family involvement.

Shaw, K. & Replogle, E. (1995). *Challenges in Evaluating Comprehensive School-Linked Service Efforts*. The Evaluation Exchange: Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard University. Available online at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval/issue1/replogle.html>.

This working paper, presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, discusses the evaluation challenges facing complex school-linked services and describes and assesses how 17 such initiatives have been evaluated.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2000). *Prevention Works Through Community Partnerships: Findings from SAMHSA/CSAP's National Evaluation*. DHHS Publication No. (SMA)00-3373. Available online at <http://www.health.org/govstudy/ms666/findings.htm>.

This report describes findings from the 48-Community Study, which tracked and evaluated the outcomes of prevention strategies used by 251 community partnerships to decrease substance abuse by improving conditions in the community environment. The study reinforces the need for communities to work together and form partnerships to reduce drug and alcohol abuse -- a strategy proven to be more effective than traditional, fragmented approaches. These materials are designed to assist practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

Taylor-Powell, E., Rossing, B., & Geran, J. (1998). *Evaluating Collaboratives: Reaching the Potential*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-System Board of Regents and University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension.

Drawing primarily on literature in health and human services, this manual provides a compendium of ideas and research to facilitate the self-evaluation efforts of coalitions and other types of collaborations.

U.S. Department of Education (1997). *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School*. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters>.

This guidebook outlines the steps needed to successfully convert a school into a community learning center and lists resources for further information and assistance. Included are concrete suggestions for how to develop a community learning center budget, build consensus and partnership, conduct a community assessment of needs and resources, design an effective program, and evaluate a program's accomplishments.

U.S. Department of Education and Regional Educational Laboratory Network. *Putting the Pieces Together: Comprehensive School-Linked Strategies for Children and Families*. Available online at <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/css/ppt/putting.htm>.

This guidebook is primarily addressed to school leaders who want to expand their efforts to help children and families succeed. It illustrates how principals, teachers, and other members of a school staff can reach out to families and the community to build a system of strong support for the healthy development and learning of their children.

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