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# 2002-2003 MANUAL

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ST. LOUIS COUNTY  
TRUANCY COURT

(314) 522-0867 EXT: 264

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**THIS MANUAL WAS ADAPTED FROM  
THE TRUANCY COURT DIVERSION PROJECT  
IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY.**

# **FACT SHEETS**





## **ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT FACT SHEET**

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### **Program Overview:**

Recognizing that truancy is a significant predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior and long-term economic hardship, St. Louis County Truancy Court intervenes with elementary and middle school students who have displayed a pattern of absenteeism *before* the students may need to be referred to Family Court for truancy. Dressed in robe, the Truancy Court Judge holds weekly “court” sessions at the school, reviewing each participating student’s attendance, behavior, and academic performance. Each participating student then receives positive reinforcement and incentives for his or her weekly achievements.

### **What are the goals of St. Louis County Truancy Court?**

Truancy Court’s primary goal is to increase school attendance for the students participating in the program. Subsequently, the program aims to improve academic achievement, link students and families with appropriate community services, and decrease the need for referrals to Family Court. Additionally, court activities are designed to increase parental involvement and reinforce Character Plus traits.

### **Who are the Truancy Court students?**

The program targets students in participating elementary and middle schools who have shown a pattern of excessive absenteeism, as indicated by 10 - 15 absences the year prior to Truancy Court. Aiming to reach students who are *at risk* for referral to Family court, children and youth who are currently being served by Family Court and/or Division of Family Services are not eligible for participation.

### **Are students required to participate?**

No, students are not required to participate in Truancy Court. As a voluntary program, parents may choose not to take advantage of the Truancy Court program. However, if the truant behavior continues or worsens, the school may formally refer the case to Family Court for truancy or educational neglect.

### **How are parents involved?**

Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to attend each weekly Truancy Court session with their child. The parents play an integral role in identifying the root cause of the students’ attendance problems and in solving these problems.

## **Who participates on the Truancy Court Teams?**

### **The Judge**

Judges, commissioners, and attorneys volunteer to preside as Truancy Court Judges at individual schools. Dressed in robe, the judge meets individually with students and parents to discuss academic and behavioral progress, highlighting the student's achievements. Volunteer judges for 2001-2002 include Susan Block, Michael Burton, Anna Forder, Bill Grant, Michael Jamison, Phillip Jones, Terry Jones, Mary Pat Schroeder, Thea Sherry, Ellen Levy Siwak, David Vincent, and Barbara Wallace.

### **The Family Advocate**

School social workers or guidance counselors serve as the Truancy Court Family Advocate. The advocate coordinates the student selection process at the school and conducts home visits with each family prior to court. Seated next to the judge, the advocate helps identify and solve barriers to school attendance and links the student and families to appropriate community services.

### **The Deputy Juvenile Officer**

The Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO) serves as a liaison between the Truancy Court Team and Family Court of St. Louis County. Additionally, the DJO helps the group complete character education lessons, including topics such as responsibility, goal setting, and honesty.

## **Who are key partners in St. Louis County Truancy Court Collaboration?**

The Truancy Court program is a collaboration between families, schools, and courts working together to improve education in St. Louis County. Partners for 2001-2002 include the Family Court of St. Louis County; the Ferguson-Florissant, Hazelwood, Parkway, Pattonville, Ritenour, Riverview Gardens, Valley Park, and Webster Groves School Districts; and the University of Missouri - St. Louis. The Kirkwood, Mehlville, Normandy, University City, and Wellston School Districts joined the collaboration in 2002-2003.

## **How is the program funded?**

The St. Louis County Truancy Court Diversionary Project is funded by a Safe Schools Grant through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and by the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant, administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Additionally, the program receives numerous contributions from local organizations and the participating school districts.

## **How can you learn more about St. Louis County Truancy Court?**

St. Louis County Truancy Court  
6038 Caroline Avenue  
Berkeley, Missouri 63134  
(314) 522-0867, extension 264

## **GUIDE FOR THE SCHOOL**

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### **Student Selection:**

- ❑ Using attendance records and faculty referrals identify 20 potential students for inclusion in the program. Participants should have 10-15 absences per year, excused and/or unexcused.
- ❑ Send names, birth dates, and attendance history of potential students to Christy Duncker at Family Court, 615-4562, fax: 615-4477 for record checks. As a diversionary program participants should not have an open case with Family Court or be currently involved with DFS.
- ❑ A maximum of 15 students can participate in Truancy Court per semester.

### **Family Advocate Responsibilities:**

- ❑ Conduct home visit to recruit families into voluntary program. Interview parent/guardian to assess strengths and needs and to obtain consent for student participation. Place copies of assessments and signed consent forms in student's Truancy Court file.
- ❑ Attend all weekly Truancy Court sessions seated next to the judge and facilitate Truancy Court team meetings.
- ❑ Provide direct services to students and families to improve school attendance. Link students and families to appropriate community resources.
- ❑ Coordinate Parent Orientation, Field Trip, Family Fun Activity, and Graduation.
- ❑ Complete, distribute, and return surveys for program evaluation.

### **Other School Responsibilities to be provided by Family Advocate and/or other school personnel (e.g., Principals, Counselors, SROs, Attendance Clerks):**

- ❑ Provide breakfast, coffee, milk and/or juice at all Truancy Court sessions.
- ❑ Provide weekly incentives to each student attending Truancy Court.
- ❑ Distribute Truancy Court Weekly Report Cards to teachers regarding students' weekly performance. Collect completed reports and compile in student's Truancy Court file prior to each Truancy Court session.
- ❑ Provide weekly attendance reports for each student and compile in student's Truancy Court file prior to each session.
- ❑ Provide historical and longitudinal data regarding attendance, suspensions, and discipline referrals for program evaluation.

### **Teacher Responsibilities:**

- ❑ *Promptly* complete Truancy Court Weekly Report Card for each student participating in Truancy Court, providing information on academics, preparation, and behavior. Include positive remarks about student's achievements.

## **GUIDE FOR THE JUDGE**

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### **Primary Responsibilities:**

- ❑ **Conduct Truancy Court proceedings at your designated middle or elementary school once each week for 12 weeks. (Contact Truancy Court Coordinator to arrange for substitute judges.)**
- ❑ **Serve as an approachable authority figure for the participants, building relationships by providing positive reinforcement for the student's achievements at school the previous week.**
- ❑ **Cooperate with the Truancy Court team, including the Family Advocate, Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO), and other school personnel.**

### **Do:**

- ❑ Wear a judicial robe during the proceedings. (Truancy Court will provide a robe for attorney and substitute judge's use.)
- ❑ Review each student's weekly performance on academics, behavior, and preparation as evaluated by the teachers. Acknowledge their accomplishments and set goals for improvement as needed.
- ❑ Discuss negative reports quietly and confidentially.
- ❑ Announce positive reports for each student publicly, initiating group applause for the student's accomplishments.
- ❑ Conduct a brief (5-10 minute) group discussion on the character education lesson distributed by the DJO.
- ❑ Encourage parents/families to join the student at your Truancy Court "bench."
- ❑ Invite your bailiff to join you to formally call court to order or ask another team member (e.g., School Resource Officer) to fill the role of the bailiff.

### **Do Not:**

- ❑ In depth problem solving and conferencing for complex issues should not be handled during court. Because court sessions are held during normal school hours, the time you spend with each student should be brief (approximately 5 minutes).

## **GUIDE FOR THE DJO**

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### **Primary Responsibilities:**

- ❑ **Serve as consultant to school district personnel and Truancy Court Judges regarding St. Louis County Family Court, truancy, and community support systems.**
- ❑ **Attend and assist at weekly Truancy Court sessions (12 per semester), Family Fun Nights and Field Trips (1 each per semester).**

### **Do:**

- ❑ Collect student and parent attendance at weekly Truancy Court sessions. Report attendance to the Truancy Court office by the last working day of each month.
- ❑ Select, copy, and distribute character education lessons to the students at each Truancy Court session. (Truancy Court office will provide sample worksheets.)
- ❑ Interact with students and families while they are waiting to speak to judge, discussing character education lessons, student and family needs, weekly progress, etc.
- ❑ Help monitor the Truancy Court process, reporting any problems to Tina Hageman, Truancy Court Coordinator.
- ❑ Attend Truancy Court meetings, training sessions, and annual retreat.
- ❑ Provide information to students, families, judges, and school district personnel on other Family Court services, referring them to the appropriate persons when needed.

### **Do Not:**

- ❑ As a diversionary program, it is not appropriate for DJOs to provide casework, supervision, or treatment services for students and/or families currently participating in Truancy Court.



**PROGRAM**  
**THEORY AND PRACTICE**



# **ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT DIVERSION PROJECT**

## **THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The goal of the Truancy Court Diversion Project is to insure each child in St. Louis County has access to the best education a school district can provide. There are four basic behavioral objectives for this endeavor:

1. Decrease number of absences and tardies
2. Decrease number of days suspended
3. Improve grade point average
4. Promote to next grade level

Committed professionals must clear the path to reaching the goal. By doing so, the quality of life in the community is improved. A committed multi-disciplinary team, sharing a vision and a passion, in concert with a well-developed program of service and service delivery, can make significant improvement in school attendance and achievement.

This model strives to identify and address as many family needs as possible. These areas of focus include academic achievement, parenting skills, drug and alcohol concerns, domestic violence, wellness issues and similar family and school concerns. The interaction between judge and family provides participants with enhanced social skills and a sense of increased empowerment; leading to more effective parenting, better communication and an increased appreciation of education.

### **HISTORY**

The Truancy Court Diversion Project was first created in December of 1997, in Louisville, Kentucky, as a response to the need to develop new and innovative approaches to the problem of truancy and educational neglect. In studying the problem locally, several facts were acknowledged:

- Regardless of local programming, some families remained untouched, with the children missing in excess of 20 days per year.

- Community agencies continued to name truancy as an indicator of many other social problems, yet collaborative efforts to wage war against poor school attendance were splintered and poorly defined.
- Poor attendance continued to serve as a common denominator in youth that were charged with the commission of serious crimes.

The task at hand was to gather a team of truly committed individuals, from a number of agencies and organizations, working together, who all believed change was possible, possessing the energy and enthusiasm to tackle a problem long since written off, by many, as unsolvable. Adopting a policy of “whatever it takes”, the first Truancy Diversion Project Court began at Meyzeek Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky. Followed by three additional middle schools and seven elementary schools, the project targeted some 300 families during the 1999-2000 school year.

The first Truancy Court in St. Louis County, Missouri, began at Berkeley Middle School in the Ferguson-Florissant School District in January 2000. Twenty-one families were targeted to participate in the program and 75% of the students participating in the program increased attendance rates compared with the preceding semester. Additionally, Truancy Court students participated in an after-school class and the girls attended a Project HART Group conducted by Family Mental Health of St. Louis County. Medical and psychological evaluations were also obtained, drug testing and family/individual counseling arranged, and mentoring (job shadowing) opportunities scheduled. School officials also noted that there was increased parental involvement within the school. While involved with Truancy Court, the participating students and their families had a “Family Fun Night” held at the school and also went on a field trip to COCA to attend University City High’s spring musical.

The following year seven school districts in St. Louis County joined the Truancy Court program: Hazelwood, Parkway, Pattonville, Ritenour, Riverview Gardens, Valley Park, and Webster Groves. Within the eight districts, a total of 160 students and families participated in the Truancy Court program during the 2000-2001 school year, accomplishing the goal of decreasing the average number of absences for participating students. Based on their success, the eight school districts formed a collaboration and were awarded a 2001-2002 Safe Schools Grant for the St. Louis County Truancy Court Diversion Project from the Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education. The grant includes a comprehensive three-year

program evaluation plan, which helped encourage expansion into five additional school districts in 2002-2003: Kirkwood, Mehlville, Normandy, University City, and Wellston.

A very unique and challenging aspect of the Project, allowing for flexibility and creativity, is the collaborative administration of the program. No one organization, agency or department takes unilateral control of operations.

## **ROLE OF THE JUDGE**

Each judge participating in the project is volunteering precious time to the program. In many cases, rescheduling of trials, cases and hearings becomes necessary, affecting not only the judge but also his division support staff, as well as attorneys and the public. Each judge who has chosen to volunteer has done so due to a sincere commitment to our children and community. Their expertise and energy is the core of our program.

The judge's role in the program is of extreme importance. Although the judge possesses no actual legal control over the family, the presence and interest of that individual during the session has proven to provide a significant influence in effecting positive change. Each judge brings his or her own special personality to the "courtroom." Therefore, the tenor and rhythm of each site is unique. The "bench manner" of each judge inspires individual characteristics in each environment. Some judges bring their bailiffs to the session while others may use the services of the DJO and school faculty. Each team will need to develop its own practices and procedures based on the requirements established by the judge.

## **CHOOSING THE PARTICIPATING SCHOOL**

The Truancy Court is a collaboration of many partners seeking to improve school attendance. **The program is a preventive action designed to divert students from entering the formal court system.** The school is an essential partner in the Project. Without support, cooperation and the resources provided by each school and its staff, the program could not function. The entire Truancy Court team works to help each participating family find success.

Each school district must determine if the goals and policies of the Truancy Court can be integrated into its own philosophy of education, its consolidated plan and its own unique climate. The school and agency partnership most foster a "whatever it takes" philosophy to keep children

in school and to encourage family functioning at the highest level. **In order for the program to function effectively, the school administration and faculty must be able and willing to:**

- Provide appropriate space for Truancy Court and related activities.
- Strive to make families feel welcomed by providing easy access to the building and refreshments during each court session.
- Support the philosophical approach of the Truancy Court, which seeks to remove barriers to school attendance, to provide support to students and families enabling them to improve attendance and to recognize success with a variety of incentives and rewards.
- Support the recommendation of the Judge and Truancy Court team for counseling, tutoring and other services deemed necessary to achieve success.
- Assist the team in the collection of data and in the selection of participants and for on-going monitoring.
- Agree to develop a plan regarding suspensions in conjunction with the Truancy Court philosophy.

Schools are offered inclusion in the program based on the following:

- Availability of a Judge and Deputy Juvenile Officer
- Commitment of school staff to the philosophy and practices of Truancy Court
- Availability of a Family Advocate (District/School Social Worker)

The Truancy Court Team will:

- Work with the school administrations to educate faculty and staff about the goals, policies, and philosophy of the program.
- Support the academic achievement of participants and re-enforce the school's academic goals. This support will include incentives that bolster achievement, including field trips, extra curricular activities and encouragement from team members.
- Re-enforce appropriate classroom behavior by making note of successes and/or failures during "court," by providing information to counselors and teachers and using character education mini-lessons to foster skill development.

- Support the school's efforts to promote a positive school climate.
- Meet with local staff as requested.

**The Elementary School Truancy Court** is clearly aimed at avoiding referrals to DFS due to educational neglect. The focus is on parents who have exhibited problems getting children to school, organizational difficulties, and general "life" problems. The team will aid parents in becoming more pro-active rather than reactive, and in the development of improved coping skills and problem solving abilities, parents will be guided towards assuming a greater sense of responsibility in the education of their children. A primary program goal will be to help young parents make better choices to take more control over their lives.

Unlike the elementary program, **The Middle School Truancy Court** is aimed more directly at the behavior of the child. Attendance issues are focused at the adolescent. The child will be expected to develop the resiliency and habits necessary to attend school with support of a parent, or in some cases, in spite of the parent. Parents are still expected to attend and participate in the Truancy Court program. Experience has shown that parents in the middle school program are quicker to agree to participate than elementary because they are more likely to identify the student as the cause. However, the team must be prepared to offer solutions to family-based problems in which both parents and children play a role.

## **SELECTING APPROPRIATE STUDENTS**

As a court diversion and truancy prevention program, student selection criteria includes those students with a pattern of absenteeism indicated by 10-15 days of unexcused and/or excused absences per year or a history of excessive tardiness. Students who have accumulated more than 15 absences per year will not be adequately served through the Truancy Court Diversion Project, but should be referred to Family Court or DFS for more comprehensive services.

Any number of interested individuals may recommend students to participate in the program, including teachers, counselors, school social workers, school resource officers, and building administrators. Parents may also refer their own children. Participating schools should provide a list of all students missing 10 – 15 days of absences to Truancy Court staff to help

identify appropriate student participants. The following student/families should be omitted from the list of potential participants:

1. Students adjudicated/involved with the Family Court
2. Families with open or on-going abuse and neglect cases including educational neglect
3. Previous program participants
4. Families with historic and complex issues, e.g. serious mental health issues

The team should also omit families known to have suffered from crises not always reflected specifically on a computer printout, i.e., homelessness, verified chronic illness, death of a parent, house-fire, etc.

Once a family has been identified as appropriate, the family advocate must consider if the family meets additional criteria including:

1. Parents' willingness to participate, including attending "court" and accepting referrals to counseling and community resources
2. Accepting the voluntary nature of the program
3. Acknowledgement of an attendance problem.

## **RECRUITING FAMILIES**

**Truancy Court is a voluntary diversion program.** Families are active and necessary partners on the team and with the process. During recruitment the student's current attendance is discussed and options for families are explored. Opportunities offered by the program are defined.

The team should clearly define expectations. Weekly attendance by parents in court is stressed as well as participation in related activities. Parents should agree to take whatever steps necessary to ensure their child attends school. The serious nature of the problem must always be

legitimized, but **the family must also be led to understand the program is based on a non-punitive foundation where genuine caring for the child is the major motivator.**

Lastly, it is vital the family understand services provided will be available to all individuals in the household. Supporting the family unit as a whole increases the support for the child as an individual.

### **The Initial Home Visit**

The initial home visit is the first interaction between family and project. The visit is extremely important, as the success of the visit results in the family agreeing to participate. To enhance this success, the following procedures should become a part of the home-visit component:

1. Ideally, two team members should make the initial visit, one being a person representing a serious, firm, impersonal approach. The Truancy Court staff can represent the serious role. The other individual should be the Family Advocate who can offer support and encouragement to the parent, while explaining the help available to a participating family.
2. The program should be presented as a healthy alternative to being formally referred to court. The family must understand the child's attendance record merits a formal referral but it is the desire of the team to avoid such a tactic if attendance can be improved using other methods.
3. The family should understand fully their participation is completely voluntary. If the parent should refuse to participate, the family will be given a chance to correct the problem on its own. However, if the problem continues, the school can submit a formal referral to court.

### **Student Assessment**

Service plans should be developed for each family using the following procedures:

- Identification of needs, concerns, and challenges within the family, paying particular attention to school related areas

- Identification of family strengths
- The creation of specific action steps, time-frames and responsibilities
- Documentation and celebration of progress

Development of a service plan should begin during the first interaction with the family. Essentially, this is a psychosocial assessment. Particular attention must be given to factors relating to school performance, behavior and attendance. These issues should be discussed and refined into measurable goals during the initial staffing. Identified issues can relate to family as well as individuals. Goals should be broken into action steps (behavioral objectives) and include specific service providers and referral sources. Once goals are defined all parties should agree to the plan and sign it, thereby accepting responsibility for its success. The initial assessment and service plan should be completed and given to the judge before the first “court date.” This will allow the judge to respond to any especially important sections. The plan can be amended as new issues surface, but the original process should be followed.

**Examples of parental goals include:**

- Increasing the families’ involvement with their child’s education by encouraging a “comfort zone” between home and school.
- Increasing the organizational skills at home in order to make school attendance a more natural part of the family rhythm. For example, creating age-appropriate home rules, such as:
  - Daily homework time
  - Curfew on school nights and weekends
  - Bedtime with lights out
- Teaching of simple “home-school” skills:
  - Understanding the report card
  - Knowing how and whom to ask for help
  - Knowing when a child is too sick to go to school
  - Making the most of a parent-teacher conference
- Encouraging family engagement in school activities
- Positively recognizing student and family success
- Providing linkage to community resources

To improve the effectiveness of the plan, **the Truancy Court team should also define weekly goals with the student and family**, with the first goal always being specifically related to school attendance. Carboned copies allow for increased communication among the Truancy Court team members, student, family and school representatives. The Family Advocate should monitor student and family progress. All individuals witnessing improvement should share that information with the team. Progress and accomplishments should always be recognized.

### **Building Family Support and Involvement**

A parent with a positive school experience is likely to be more actively involved in their child's education. Sadly, the reverse also seems true. The team must work to build strong bridges between home and school whenever possible. One program objective must be to help parents set goals and expectations at home and to support goals and expectations at school. Understanding the concept of rewards and meaningful consequences should be consistently promoted. Parents must feel they are truly a part of the team and that all team members ultimately work towards the same success.

The established program in Louisville, Kentucky taught us that students exhibit most success when parents attend weekly court sessions and cooperate with all staff recommendations. This must be emphasized by all team members whenever possible. Weaknesses in support shown by parents translate to children as a lack of importance. Barriers to participation should be removed as often as possible. Transportation resources should be considered. Offering help in forming carpools might help; bus tickets can be distributed. In some cases, especially with the elementary group, it may be necessary to identify a source of child-care to allow parents to participate without having to deal with infants or toddlers. The Truancy Court team can also write letters requesting that employers excuse parental absences from work. If barriers prohibit parents from attending, other family members or interested adults should attend with the child.

Bonding of participating families can occur by allowing time to share frustrations and concerns. Creating avenues of inclusion can help bring isolated parents into fully vested participants. The program strives to arm families with useable information regarding services

within their community. Parents who feel respected, feel their opinions are valued and are treated like equals are most apt to provide the high level of commitment, energy and cooperation that guarantees their children a higher level of success.

### **Summary Points for Building Parental Involvement**

- Emphasize commitment
- Engage in meaningful activities
- Educate, whenever possible
- Remove barriers to attendance whenever possible
- Enlarge the sense of responsibility
- Provide empathetic support
- Provide information regarding community resources

### **PARENT ORIENTATION**

The Orientation Session should occur one week before “court” begins. Essentially, this is a time when ground rules and expectations are reviewed with the parents/guardians and questions can be answered. Children routinely do not attend orientation, giving staff an opportunity for some adult discourse.

Orientation may best be described as a reality check for parents. It is a time to discuss parental responsibility and the law. It’s a time to discuss the possible repercussions if improvement in attendance is not achieved. Staff should be as forthright and candid as possible to seek the full attention of the parent. Individual concerns of parents may also be addressed individually at the conclusion of the orientation session. Parents may exhibit resistance, denial or hostility during this session. Some parents may become very silent and withdraw themselves from the group. Team members should be prepared to field these emotional responses. Parents may translate the invitation to participate in the program as a label of poor parenting and respond accordingly. Confidentiality issues must be discussed during Orientation. The ‘open-forum’ format should be described along with the assurance that privacy will be provided without

question if requested. Parents should be informed they only need to alert the Family Advocate of the request and it will be honored.

While the Family Advocate should coordinate the Orientation's time, location and invitations, no one staff person should be responsible for it. Each team member will have topics to discuss. Additionally, all necessary paperwork and signatures should be completed at Orientation.

## **THE "COURT" PROCEDURE**

Each family will appear before the judge at the school weekly for ten to twelve weeks. Court should occur within the time frame of one class period with the specific time determined by each participating school team. Each week the Family Advocate will provide a weekly update for the judge's review. This report will include progress reports by all of the student's teachers, as well as attendance records.

The best location for court is typically the library, although a private classroom, assembly room, or cafeteria may be appropriate. The advocate and judge are seated together at a table, with files for each child. Principals, counselors, teachers, and school resource officers are also in the courtroom to foster positive communication with the parents. Parents and students are seated at desks throughout the room, working on assignments as they wait to be called by the judge. To emphasize the serious nature of the proceedings, the judge is dressed in robe and a designated bailiff calls court to order.

After the judge reviews a given student's file, the student and parent are called to go to the judge's "bench." School staff should join the student if no parent is present. The judge shakes the student's hand and engages him in brief conversation, providing feedback to the student and family about the student's progress as reported by the teachers. The judge may make additional requests or recommendations at this time, as may Family Advocates and other staff. Teachers are also encouraged to share positive information with the team. The judge will then publicly praise the student for positive behaviors, requesting applause from the group.

Negative reports are handled confidentially. In depth problem solving and conferencing are not a part of “court.” This is a time for general acknowledgement of the previous week’s accomplishments. The Family Advocate should anticipate questions and concerns and be prepared to provide the judge with the information sought. Complex issues should be dealt with outside “court” time.

It is recommended each case file contain a picture of the family. These literally “puts a face to the story” and personalize case activity on a higher level.

### **Weekly Reports from Teachers**

Weekly teacher reports are essential to the program’s progress. All Truancy Court students’ teachers must promptly submit this report to the Truancy Court team prior to each court session. Information noted on this report should include students’ progress regarding:

- Academics
- Preparation
- Behavior
- Attendance

Additionally, teachers should always include positive comments about the students’ performance. Suggestions for student improvement are also welcome and will be discussed privately at the court session. Teachers are also invited to attend court to speak individually with the judge and parents.

To develop a positive relationship with the school, the Truancy Court team must also communicate regularly with the teachers. It is strongly recommended that the **Judge attend at least one faculty meeting per semester** to meet the faculty and briefly explain what occurs during the court sessions. Truancy Court staff and other team members should also make every effort to join this faculty meeting. The team should also communicate directly with teachers on a regular basis, especially when the student develops goals that relate to a specific teacher or classroom. The goals can be easily shared with the teacher by giving them a carbon copy of the student’s goal sheet.

## **Character Education Mini-Lessons**

To take advantage of the captive audience, the court includes character education mini-lessons. The judge will typically present a 10-minute mini-lesson on character education and students are asked to complete a written assignment on the topic. To enhance the lesson, other members of the Truancy Court team may conduct a longer group session while the students wait to speak to the judge. Scripts and worksheets are provided for elementary and secondary students regarding cooperation, goal setting, honesty, perseverance, respect, responsibility, self-esteem, and service. The Truancy Court office can provide additional character education worksheets to Truancy Court teams upon request.

Students should also be urged to take advantage of their downtime in court by completing homework and late or missing assignments. Parents and other adults present at the court sessions can provide assistance on their schoolwork during this time.

## **Incentives, Recognition And Rewards**

Incentives, recognitions and rewards are vital program components. Truancy Court requires individual sites to provide refreshments (donuts, coffee, milk and/or juice) for participating families. The greater the sense of hospitality, the better the chance for closing the gap between families-at-risk and the schools.

Material incentives, in the form of school supplies, uniforms and curriculum-related items, intended to promote positive family interaction and social skills should be used as a regular part of the program. The Truancy Court Project will provide assistance with purchasing incentives (alarm clocks, dictionaries, calculators, etc.), but each Truancy Court team should also purchase incentives specifically chosen to motivate your students and families. Incentive activities should be scheduled early in the cycle to promote group cohesion.

1. Staff should develop a list of possible activities with input from families when possible
2. Incentives/rewards should be an integral part of aftercare planning in order to maintain a maximum level of engagement in the program.
3. All sites must provide a closing, recognition celebration at the end of the cycle

## **Academic Support/Tutoring**

Almost every child served by the project has shown a need for remediation and tutoring. This makes the academic support component of the program very important. The Truancy Court team plays a vital role in connecting a student to an academic support or enrichment program. In many St. Louis County school districts tutoring services are prevalent, though sometimes poorly accessed. A weak spot in the provision of tutoring services may occur due to a lack of coordination between school and tutoring staff.

The Truancy Court team should therefore review the academic record of each child and consult with the faculty. An academic needs assessment should be developed based on academic functioning and goals. Based on this information a tutorial plan may be defined. Again, the genuine linkage between child, provider and school is imperative.

## **Community Resources**

Success of this prevention model has been connected to the ability to access support and involvement of respected community resources. As the community has come together to help families and children become successful in school it only becomes more evident there is always room for additional, accessible services. Team members are urged to always search neighborhoods for programs and services available to our families.

## **STAFFINGS**

Scheduled staffings must be included as a component of the local site program to ensure that student and family needs are being adequately addressed. The purpose of the staffing is to accomplish the following:

- Review the service plan and student's progress
- Provision of continuity and quality of service
- Recommendations for formal action, if necessary
- Recommendations for after-care
- Clarify the role and responsibilities of each team member

The Family Advocate should facilitate the staffing and should gather and prepare any relevant written documents. Three (3) staffings are recommended per cycle:

1. Before the first “court”
2. Mid-point in the court cycle
3. At completion of the cycle, with emphasis on aftercare plans

Team members to be invited to each staffing include:

- Presiding Judge
- Family Advocate
- Family Court Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO) assigned to judge
- Truancy Court Staff: Coordinator, Social Worker, Aftercare Counselor
- Other interested local school staff: Principals, Counselors, School Social Workers, School Resource Officers, Attendance Clerks, Teachers, etc.
- Community Mental Health or DFS worker
- Contract therapy providers

## **GROUP ACTIVITIES**

Group activities are field trips and programs scheduled at each school site. There are usually two or three planned activities per truancy court cycle including active students, parents and team members. **Group activities should include a field trip, a family fun night, and a graduation ceremony.**

The purpose of the group activities is to encourage teambuilding opportunities for participating families and to expose participants to new experiences. Programs may also be used as celebrations for completion of the project. Group activities should be interactive, family oriented, safe and, of course, fun. Team participation is expected at these activities. Site teams are urged to remember trips and programs must be cleared as “safe” and “appropriate” for students. Trips and activities should include a learning experience. They should be active, rather than passive activities where growth and development are a natural part of the process.

All sites are encouraged to sponsor a “Family Fun Night” which should include all the members of the household. A pizza party offering a motivational speaker, musical entertainment, and games for the smaller children and team building games, offers the family a chance to be together and have fun while developing better communication and parenting skills. Family Fun Nights provide a great sense of community and allow for relaxed networking between all members of the group.

All sites should also coordinate a “Graduation” celebration during or after the final “court” session.

## **AFTERCARE**

Throughout each court cycle, it is imperative that families understand the program lasts beyond the original twelve weeks. Students must be encouraged to make lasting changes in behaviors, as must their parents. Program success is measured by the degree to which children continue to attend school after the completion of the active portion of the program. Aftercare promotes the continued success.

The Truancy Court program currently provides a counselor to facilitate Aftercare Groups the semester following Truancy Court, but it is essential that the Truancy Court team helps plan the Aftercare program according to student needs. Topics typically discussed at the aftercare groups include: attendance, emotional skills, anger management, self-esteem, goals, diversity, decision-making, assertiveness, and drug/alcohol prevention. Detailed planning of an “aftercare-prescriptive” will enhance positive behaviors. Aftercare planning and program should include the following components:

- Summary of student and family strengths, needs, and goals
- Aftercare staffing
- Identification of aftercare incentives to be awarded
- Identification of attendance monitor
- Procedures for children who experience attendance difficulties while in Aftercare
- Planned academic supports based on individual needs
- Identification of activities to continue positive interactions with Aftercare parents

The Truancy Court team is encouraged to join aftercare activities including:

- Cards/letters to parents to recognize continuing improvements
- A planned activity with current Truancy Court group
- Parent phone conferences
- Use of Truancy Court “alumni” in program as mentors, office aids, helpers
- Continued informal encouragement

## **EVALUATION**

Providing pre-project, post-project and long-term evaluations are essential to properly meet the needs of our targeted students and families. Therefore, the University of Missouri – St. Louis is conducting a comprehensive, three-year, independent evaluation to determine Truancy Court’s impact on student attendance, academic achievement, parental involvement, and character education, as well as program implementation. All participating schools must maintain and report accurate data regarding student attendance, enrollment, discipline referrals, and grades. The program evaluation also includes on-site observations, interviews, and questionnaires with all program participants and team members.



# **CHARACTER EDUCATION**

## **INTRODUCTION**



# **CHARACTER EDUCATION INTRODUCTION**

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## **LESSONS FOR THE TRUANCY COURT**

This curriculum is a set of 8 elementary and 8 secondary lessons to be used in the Truancy Court project. The lessons are for use at the start of each weekly session, allowing about 10 minutes for the lesson/discussion. The lessons can also be used to conduct a group during the time students are waiting to speak with the judge. They include individual work for the students to do while the judge is speaking with other students individually.

The order of lessons can be varied. For many, starting with Goal Setting for week 1 and Perseverance for week 2 will be a good plan. The lessons are presented in alphabetical order.

The lessons are scripted in order to give the presiding official ready-to-use material that does not require additional preparation. However they can be modified according to individual style. The script to be read or paraphrased is in regular type. Questions are in bold. In italics is background detail. Sometimes this background detail is additional information. Sometimes it is possible student responses. If students are slow in contributing their thoughts, the leader can prime the pump with some of these potential responses.

## **GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS**

1. With younger students, you may have to do more explaining and expect less discussion from them. Be flexible as you get to know the level of your group.
2. Allow some time of silence as students think about what you have asked. Some questions take longer to think.
3. After someone gives their answer, resist saying, "Great answer." This will make everyone else try to answer with similar thoughts. Just say, "Thanks," and continue.
4. Don't embarrass anyone, even to make a joke.

## **QUESTIONS TO AVOID WHEN LEADING A DISCUSSION**

1. Too many questions that can be answered "yes" or "no."
2. Long, wordy questions where the meaning is forgotten before you even finish asking the question.
3. A question within a question.
4. Questions that are too general or too vague.
5. Questions that kids do not have enough experience to answer.

## **QUESTIONS THAT CAN KEEP A DISCUSSION GOING**

1. Can you give us an example...?
2. What did you mean when you said...
3. What makes you believe that?
4. Please explain what you just said.
5. What reason do you have to feel that way?
6. Could you expand on that?
7. Please, tell us more about...
8. What else can you add?
9. Sue, what do you think of Jamel's answer?
10. Bonnie, tell us what you think.
11. Brandon, you have said a great deal. What do others think?

When you ask these questions be sure to convey the attitude that you are seeking further information that would help the discussion, not that you are asking them to defend their opinion.

## **REASONS FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION**

Thomas Lickona (1992) provides the following reasons why character education is important in our schools:

1. There is a clear and urgent need, as young people increasingly hurt themselves and others because of unawareness of and/or indifference to moral values.
2. Transmitting moral values to the next generation is one of the most important functions of civilization.
3. The school's role as character educator is even more vital when millions of children get little moral teaching from parents, community or religious institutions.
4. Common ground exists on universally accepted moral values like caring, trust, respect and responsibility.
5. Democracies have a special need for moral education because democracy is a government of, for, and by the people themselves.
6. There is no such thing as a value-free education. Schools teach value-free education. Schools teach values everyday by design or default.
7. A commitment to character education is essential if we are to attract and keep good teachers.
8. Moral questions are among the greatest questions facing the individual and the human race.
9. Effective character education makes schools more civil, caring communities and leads to improved academic performance.



# **CHARACTER EDUCATION ELEMENTARY (K-5) LESSONS**



# COOPERATION

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**What is cooperation?** Think about situations here at school and at home.

*(Helping with the work, trying to use everyone's ideas, encouraging all members to join in, doing your fair share of the work, compromising)*

**To cooperate means to work together to make things go well.** You cooperate when you follow directions from your parents or teachers. You cooperate when you work well with other people on projects or jobs. You cooperate when you help others with the work.

**Cooperative people are great team members.** They are friendly and cheerful and don't complain. You will enjoy working with others when you are cooperative, and others will like to work or be on a team with you.

**What are some of the ways people have to cooperate in a family?**

*(Share chores, take turns in the bathroom, be quiet when others are trying to sleep, make sure the food gets around to everyone fairly, discuss things that bother you so bad feelings don't get worse, compromise when decisions are made about what to do on a family outing)*

**What are some ways people cooperate at school?**

*(Wait in line in the cafeteria, raise your hand and wait your turn to talk in class, help clean up after an activity, listen when others are talking)*

**What are some ways people cooperate in our community?**

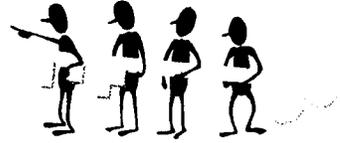
*(Follow the laws, vote when people have to be elected or decisions need to be made, volunteer to do community service, report problems you observe to proper authorities, welcome new people to the neighborhood)*

**What are reasons for you to cooperate in these different situations?**

*(It's fairer, it produces peace and harmony, it makes things run smoother and more efficiently, it is a way to prevent problems, it makes others feel good and want to cooperate too, some things cannot be accomplished alone but only with the cooperation of others)*

A famous quote from Aesop, a well-known story-teller from long ago, says, "United we stand, divided we fall." This tells us that cooperation can be more than just trying to get along together; it can also be working together to make things happen that no one can do alone. **What are some things that can only be accomplished through cooperation?**

*(Playing games; building highways, schools and hospitals; defending our country; some projects around the home that are too big for one person; organizing a school dance or party; having a safe neighborhood)*



## **COOPERATION (1)**

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How is working together different from working alone?

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What are the advantages of working together?

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What is the meaning of the phrase, "Two heads are better than one"?

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What can you do to cooperate at home?

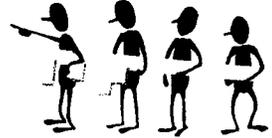
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What can you do to cooperate at school?

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## **COOPERATION (2)**

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When is cooperation hard for you personally?

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When two people have a disagreement, how can they work out the problem cooperatively?

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Think of someone at home or at school that you have a hard time cooperating with. What is the reason this is hard for you?

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Can you think of a way to help yourself become more cooperative with this person?

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## GOAL SETTING

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Successful people use goals as a personal road map to guide them where they want to go.

Without setting goals we might never achieve our dreams. There are two kinds of goals, long-term and short-term. Long-term goals are your dreams for the distant future. Short-term goals are things you are working for right now, maybe for today, or next week, or this school semester.

Goals make a difference in all areas of your life, your school life, your family life, and with your friends. Knowing what you want to happen and planning how you will make it happen are the basics of goal setting.

**What is one thing you've spent a lot of time learning to do?** This would be something that has been a goal for you. Each of you think of one thing that you've spent lots of time on. What would that be?

*(Get one response from each student. These might include learning to hit a ball with a bat, learning multiplication tables, learning to make your bed so it passes parent's inspection, etc.)*

**What is one short-term goal that you have right now, something you plan to achieve this week or this semester?**

*(Again, get one response from each student. Very simple or very complex goals are all welcome. Examples: getting a "B" in Math, improving a grade in Science, developing the habit of remembering to take out the garbage without being told, making a new friend in gym class, getting chosen for a basketball team.)*

**What long-term goals do you have for the future?** These might be things you are aiming for during the next few years (like becoming really good at the violin) or very far in the future (like becoming a teacher, or traveling to Australia, or studying Science in college).

*(Students may say things that seem unlikely, like be famous or have a band or be rich. All of these are acceptable answers.)*

**What can we do if we set a goal and we don't achieve it?**

*(We can choose to try again with the same plan; change our plan and try again; change our goal a little - maybe reaching for a somewhat easier goal in the same direction, like being a dental assistant instead of a dentist; or drop this goal altogether. It depends on how important that goal really is to us and why we were unsuccessful.)*

One goal for truancy court is for our students to be on time to school every day unless there is a very good reason to be absent. Goals require a plan. Otherwise they are dreams that may happen or not, depending on luck. **What is a good plan to help you be on time to school every day?**

*(Steps can include laying out your clothes the night before, setting the alarm for an hour before time to leave, knowing where the umbrella is in case of rain, etc.)*



## GOAL SETTING

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Write about a time you tried hard to learn something new. What did you do and how did it feel?

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What helped you the most in trying to learn this? (Check all that are true.)

I practiced this almost every day.

Someone helped me practice and learn.

I wrote down things I had to remember to learn this.

I concentrated very hard because this was very important to me.

Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

What do you need to work on as a student? List three things you can do to improve in this area.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are goals you have seen some member of your family set and work for?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## MY 10-YEAR GOAL

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Dream big and write one goal you would like to accomplish by 10 years from now. Draw a picture of something that represents this goal on the back of this page. Write one behavior or skill you will need to use or learn in order to make this happen.

My 10-year goal in words:

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One behavior or skill that I will need to accomplish this goal:

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Draw a picture of your 10-year goal on the back of this paper.

# HONESTY

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Our word for today is honesty. **What is the meaning of the word honesty?**

*(The basic idea is "telling the truth.")*

Besides telling the truth, it also means not exaggerating or changing it to make it sound different. Sometimes people do these things to mislead others. **Can anyone think of an example of a behavior that could mislead others into believing something that is not true?**

*(One example is turning in homework that you copied from a friend with your name on it, because the teacher will think this is your own work. Another is telling only part of the story and leaving out other parts.)*

Honest people do not tell lies; they do not cheat or steal. We respect and like people who are honest and trustworthy. **Do you know someone who you can trust to always be honest with you?**

*(Wait for students to answer, encouraging them to share even if they would be more comfortable not using the person's name.)*

Being totally honest with someone close to you like a parent or a friend is a very good feeling. You feel you are accepted and they will continue to love you or be your friend no matter what you say or have done. This gives you an immediate feeling of happiness. **But what about times that involve people who are not close to you, who are maybe even strangers? Are there good reasons to be honest with them?**

*(Answers can encompass various levels of moral development, from: "It's easier to tell the truth so I don't forget exactly what I said and get caught in a lie," to "I will get a bad reputation and won't be believed in the future," to "Lying can become a habit, so it's better not to start it in the first place," to "If you lie too often, you may start to believe your own lies; you won't even be honest with yourself," to "Our society is a much better place for all of us if people can be trusted to tell the truth, and that can only happen if each one of us is responsible for his own behavior and tells the truth.")*

**Can you think of a time someone lied to you?** How did this lie make you feel at that time? Has this lie affected how you feel about this person now?

*(Encourage them to describe the situation without naming names. Maybe at the time, they felt disappointed, betrayed, cheated, hurt, and angry. Long term they may find they no longer trust that person. Maybe they haven't been able to get rid of their anger yet because the lie was a big one. Perhaps if this was an unusual thing and the person didn't betray their trust any other time they can now trust the person again.)*

Lies often start a negative chain of events. The only way you can have a positive influence on the chain of events is to make a decision to always be truthful. We need will power to say to ourselves, "I know this is wrong. I will be honest." However, one of the best things anyone can say about you is that you are always honest.

Honesty is a big part of a person's reputation. Your reputation is the opinion people have of you based on your past behavior. You know the story of the boy who cried wolf. Several times this boy, who was watching sheep, called to the villagers to come to his aide to fend off a wolf. But there was no wolf. He just did it to see the villagers scurry about. After several times, they no longer believed him. Then came the day when there really was a wolf and no one came to his call.

**What does it take to have a reputation for honesty?**

*(Practicing honesty as a habit, never telling lies)*

**What does it take to earn a reputation for honesty if you previously had a reputation for lying or cheating?**

*(A return to total honesty, and then it takes time to convince people that you have changed. An important thing to remember is that you can regain a reputation for honesty)*

Make a decision to always tell the truth, never cheat, and never take anything that isn't yours. An interesting quote by an anonymous person about honesty goes like this, "Live your life so that your autograph will be wanted instead of your fingerprints."



## HONESTY (1)

Read each of the following statements and check how often you do this. Remember to be honest with yourself.

Statements	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. Copy a few answers from a classmate's paper.			
2. Let someone I don't like take the blame for something I did.			
3. Take something that doesn't belong to me from a friend who already has so much that they won't miss it.			
4. Let parents, teachers, etc. make a mistake rather than helping them by speaking up.			
5. Take something that doesn't belong to me from a store because the clerk is always unfriendly.			
6. Copy from a classmate's paper rather than make a failing grade.			
7. Let someone else copy from my paper.			
8. Tell a lie rather than get in trouble.			
9. Cheat in a game if I know I won't get caught.			
10. Keep money that is given to me in error by a cashier.			
11. Tell a lie to make myself appear to be a better person.			
12. Help a friend steal by being the lookout who warns them someone is coming.			



## HONESTY (2)

Write about the following two situations. What is the thing to do to behave with honesty in this situation?

1. At a checkout counter, the clerk gives you more change than you have coming.

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2. You've seen people in your class cheating on a test.

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Sometimes you must be brave to tell the truth. Write about a time this was true for you.

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Who do you trust? \_\_\_\_\_ List three reasons why you trust him or her.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## **HONESTY (3)**

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Write about a way you plan to be more honest in the future.

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Here are three rules for borrowing. Tell why each one is important.

a. Ask before borrowing something.

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b. Say exactly when you will return the item.

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c. Return the item on time and in good condition.

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# PERSEVERANCE

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The character trait for this week is “perseverance.” **Who can tell me what “perseverance” means?**

*(Ideas might include patience, sticking to it, not giving up, determination.)*

Many famous people are known for their perseverance. This is because you cannot really achieve anything difficult enough to make you famous unless you persevere. Another of our character traits, Goal Setting, is one essential part of achieving success. A goal is the target that represents where you’re going. Perseverance is the fuel that keeps you moving along the way. Just knowing what you want does not make it happen.

**How many of you have wanted something that you did not get?**

*(Ask the students for responses, perhaps some “things” they wanted to have, a grade in a class, being selected for some team or activity.)*

**Did you put serious effort into this goal?**

*(Probably they will acknowledge that they did not, but a follow up question for those who have tried is “Can you think of other things you could have done to be more persistent in getting to this goal?” “How much did you want this goal?”)*

**Who are some famous people you’ve heard of who must have had the quality of perseverance?**

*Depending on the student’s responses, the following examples may also be discussed:*

**Helen** Keller was born with sight and hearing but became deaf and blind as a result of an illness at the age of two. Helen had a lot of spirit and was very difficult to live with and help. She became very frustrated and angry that she could not communicate. The teacher who became famous for helping her was named Ann Sullivan. The breakthrough day came when Helen was very thirsty and wanted a drink of water. Ann had spent a lot of time writing letters in Helen’s palm trying to get the idea across that this could be a way to communicate. On this day, as Ann spelt the word “water” in Helen’s palm, Helen finally understood. It was the most exciting day of her life - when she realized that there was a way to “see.”

**Ann** and Helen both showed lots of perseverance over the years after that. They worked together until Helen could do so many things that earlier had seemed impossible. She learned to read by learning Braille and to "hear" by putting her hands on people's mouths and necks to experience them talking, and to actually speak by imitating the movements others made in their mouths and necks when they talked.

Helen once told wounded soldiers, *"You have a problem, but everyone in the world has some sort of problem. Those who are determined to work hard can usually cope with their problems. Those who give up - those people who are not determined - are usually very unhappy. Don't let anything discourage you. Keep right on trying. Then you will do what you want to do and you will be happier."*

Other examples from history include Wilber and Orville Wright who made many changes in their design for a flying machine before they were able to finally fly successfully. Their heavier-than-air machine took off on December 17, 1903 at Kitty Hawk, NC.

The greatest achievements come when you have two things:

1. A long term goal that you really want and
2. Steps for getting there that you that you will stick to.



## **PERSEVERANCE (1)**

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1. When something seems hard to do, what can you tell yourself? Write three sentences to give yourself hope.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Of all the people you know personally, who has the most perseverance? Tell about how they have shown their perseverance.

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3. Write about a time when you really wanted something but just did not do what was necessary to make it happen.

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What could you have done to persevere more toward this goal?

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Draw this goal on the back of this paper.



## **PERSEVERANCE (2)**

**A scrapbook can be a good way to keep track of the milestones in your life.** These are the things you have probably used perseverance to accomplish. List below things you have already done that you might like to put into your scrapbook.

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List here things you could plan to add to your scrapbook in the next two years.

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# RESPECT

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The theme for today is respect. **What are some words that are similar in meaning to respect?**

(Responses might include courtesy, consideration, manners, acceptance of differences, recognition, a positive opinion of someone, caring)

Respect begins with you. Having a positive attitude in the way you speak, act, and dress will make you feel good about yourself. This is the first step in feeling good about others and your surroundings.

**What does a person with self-respect look like and how do they act?** How do they show that they are confident and have a good opinion of themselves?

(Answers might include walking tall, having good eye contact, having a firm voice, not getting easily upset, not being afraid to learn something new, not being afraid to state their opinion even when others disagree.)

We hear people talk about having respect for all people. But sometimes we have to remind ourselves that this is important when we come into contact with people who are different from ourselves. It is easier to understand people who look and act like us.

We can remind ourselves that all people are alike in some ways. **What are some of the ways all people are alike?**

*(Have the same kinds of feelings, need food and water, need love and attention, etc.)*

**What are some ways people are different?**

*(Color of skin and hair, religious beliefs, skills, personalities, number of friends and interests, etc.)*

We live side by side in crowded schools and neighborhood. Respect just makes sense. If people obey the law and respect each other, then all of our lives are better.

Respect for others basically boils down to the golden rule, which has been stated in almost every religious and moral code since the beginning of man.

Aristotle: We should behave to others as we wish others to behave to us.

Buddhism: Hurt no others with that which pains thyself.

Christianity: Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.

Confucius: What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

Hinduism: Do nothing to thy neighbor, which thou wouldst not have him do to thee thereafter.

Islam: No one of you is a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

Judaism: What you hate, do not do to anyone.

### **How do people show respect?**

*Being polite and not belittling someone.*

*Being on time to class shows respect for your teacher and the other students.*

*Keeping your yard neat shows respect for the neighbors.*

*Not talking out loud in movies shows respect for the other people in the audience.*

*Wearing clothes appropriate for an occasion shows respect for other people who are there.*

*Picking up trash outside your locker shows respect for your school.*

What are some ways you see your elders teaching respect to young children as they are just beginning to understand?

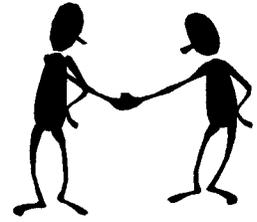
*They teach them to say please and thank you.*

*They teach them to wait their turn and not interrupt.*

*They teach them to share.*

*They teach them to pick up their toys when they're done playing.*

As we get older it is important to remember that all of these behaviors that we are taught as young children are always important.



## **RESPECT**

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A. List two examples of respectful behavior you have observed at school.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

B. List two examples of respectful behavior you have observed at home.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

C. What is one situation where you feel you should show more respect than you have in the past?

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D. Name someone you respect and explain why you respect him or her.

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E. When you are proud of what someone has done, how can you let them know? Make a list of things you can do to congratulate them.

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## **RESPONSIBILITY**

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Responsibility is a big word. It's not just big in the number of letters but in the range of meanings people assign to it. It is used very often by adults when they talk to children and teens.

**What are some of the things people mean when they talk about behaving responsibly?**

*(Following the rules, admitting when you're at fault, completing your chores or assignments on time, using self-control, taking care of something that needs to be done without being told, doing what you say you will do)*

**Who in your life depends on you to be responsible? What ways do they expect you to be responsible?**

*(Adults - parents and teachers - tend to expect all of the above behaviors. In addition, people have a responsibility to their friends, neighbors, and members of their church, the community as a whole. Ask the students for their specific responsibilities that adults have made a big deal about.)*

**What are some of the problems that arise when people do not meet their responsibilities in certain ways? For example:**

Being on time with chores or assignments

*(It makes other people have to wait on you; sometimes missing a deadline causes some opportunity to be missed altogether, like not taking out the garbage before it is to be picked up; if you let things wait, you're more likely to forget to do them)*

Admitting when you're at fault

*(Someone else may be blamed or have to do the work to make up for the mistake; time and energy will be wasted trying to find out what happened; you will get in the habit of trying to find the easy way out, and later on admitting your mistakes will just be harder)*

Following the rules

*(Other people will think it's not fair if not everyone is following the rules and they will be tempted to not follow them also, which in the long run will lead to chaos and make all*

*our lives more difficult. Like above, ignoring the rules can become a habit that will get you into more and more trouble as you go through life. You won't be able to feel any real satisfaction for things you accomplish by getting around the rules. You'll develop a reputation that you cannot be trusted.)*

Using self-control

*(Over-reacting can make a little problem into a big one. On a job, lack of self-control might get you fired. If you're being asked some questions by a policeman, lack of self-control might get you arrested even if there is no other reason to arrest you)*

Doing what you say you'll do

*(If you don't, people won't trust you in the future. Someone else may be very disappointed or get in trouble.)*

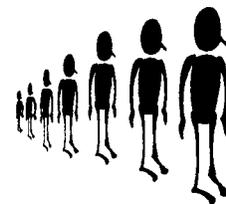
Taking care of something that needs to be done without being told

*(Sometimes no one else will even be aware of what is happening and if you don't take care of it yourself, it won't get taken care of; the time delay in waiting for someone else to do it may make the situation worse; the other person may have other things to do and not have nearly as easy a time taking care of this as you would; you would miss the opportunity to show how responsible you can be and increase the respect others have for you)*

**Who do you depend on for certain things? How do you feel if they don't come through?**

*(Some examples are parents remembering your birthday, teachers grading and returning your assignments, friends being happy to see you)*

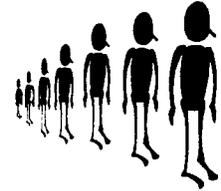
It's easy to see how much better our lives are when everyone is responsible. The thing you can do about that is be responsible yourself. The only person whose behavior you can control is your own.



## WHAT IS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY?

Can you name three responsibilities for each person on the list?

Father			
Mother			
Child			
Grandparent			
Principal			
Teacher			
Student			
Doctor			
Pilot			
Mail carrier			
Police officer			
Coach			
Trash collector			
Friend			
Baby sitter			
Zookeeper			
Add your own			



## AM I RESPONSIBLE?

Rate yourself on the following statements by checking the correct answers. *Be honest!*

Statement	Always	Usually	Never
1. I complete all my assignments.			
2. I get dressed for school in plenty of time.			
3. I don't disturb others during work time.			
4. I do chores without being told.			
5. I help even when I am not asked to.			
6. I take care of my belongings.			
7. I think through decisions.			
8. I can admit my mistakes.			
9. My family trusts me.			
10. I take care of my health.			
11. I try to be on time.			
12. People can count on me.			



## RESPONSIBILITY

1. I am responsible at home and at school in the following ways:

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2. I feel I need to improve in the following ways:

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3. Someone else who would really like to see a change in me is \_\_\_\_\_  
and they would like to see the following change in me:

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4. Write about a time when you made a choice that got you into trouble. What did you learn from this?

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## SELF-ESTEEM

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People use the word self esteem a lot these days. **What does self-esteem mean to you?**

*(Feeling good about yourself, liking yourself, having confidence, etc.)*

**When you think about the other students in your classes, do you notice differences in their levels of self-esteem? What is there about them that you notice?**

*(Ask them not to use real names, but to describe how these students behave or look. For example, someone with low self-esteem might look downward a lot, use a soft voice, dress in a careless way, etc. Someone with high self-esteem would probably have the opposite characteristics.)*

**Where do you think good self-esteem comes from? Are you born with it? Is it the same all through your life? Is it the same day in and day out, all the time?**

*(If the students don't make these points, say... Self esteem grows as you live, learn to do things, and have good experiences. It also grows as you come to appreciate that the things that make you special and unique are interesting and good instead of bad. Also it is different from time to time. When you're feeling good, rested and well fed and wearing clothes you feel good in, you tend to have more self-confidence than otherwise. When you're doing something you're good at, you have higher self-esteem than when you're doing something that's hard for you.*

So this can give you some ideas of ways you can build your self-esteem.

The more you stick your neck out to learn to do something that's hard to learn,

The more you make decisions where you can feel good about the consequences,

The more time you spend around people who encourage you and like you just for who you are,

The more you take care of yourself and are strong and healthy,

The more your self-esteem will grow.

**What is something you had to work hard to learn to do that really added to your self-esteem?**

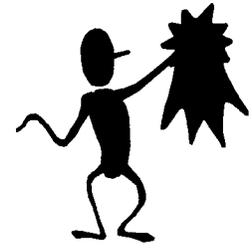
*(Repeat their answers if everyone cannot hear. You might share something from your own life to give the students food for thought.)*

There's also something I'd like to say about those times when your self-esteem is knocked down a bit. That might be when you get a lower grade than you expected, or when you aren't selected for something you try out for, or when someone says something that puts you down or hurts your feelings. **What are other circumstances that can give self-esteem a hit?**

*(Repeat any responses so all can hear.)*

**There are things you can do at these times to get your self-esteem back up as soon as possible. What are things you can think of?**

*(Walk proud so your manner lets everyone know that you still have self-confidence, even if it's hurting now. Be patient and tell yourself that this is just a temporary situation or this is just one person, that other situations and other people will be different. Figure out what you can do to correct a mistake or to perform better in the future. Realize that everyone has their own special talents; you can be happy when you appreciate your own good qualities.)*



## **SELF-ESTEEM (1)**

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1. Who is a person in your life that has helped your self-esteem grow and how have they helped?

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2. What is something you learned to do that helped your self-esteem grow?

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3. What is something you're trying to learn that will help your self-esteem grow more?

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4. What have you done to this point in your life that makes you proud?

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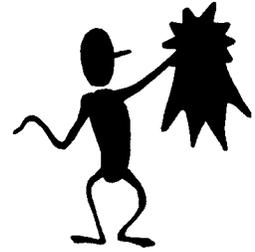
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5. What is one special thing about yourself that you really like and are proud of? Write about why you would never let anyone take this away from you.

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## SELF-ESTEEM (2)

In the following chart, make a check mark in each box that describes how the person sees you.

	Parent	Teacher	Friend	Me
Neat and clean				
Happy				
Funny				
Hard working				
Trustworthy				
Good				
Smart				
Helpful				
Talkative				
Brave				
Good listener				
Angry sometimes				
Follows rules				
Ambitious				

## SERVICE

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The word for today is service. When we hear this word we probably think about things like serving food at a homeless shelter or packing sandbags when a river floods or visiting a nursing home to talk to patients there. **What are some other ways you know of that people perform service?**

*(Collecting clothing or food for charities, helping older people in the neighborhood with chores around the house or yard, volunteering at a hospital, volunteering with organizations like the Red Cross or the Salvation Army, building houses with Habitat for Humanity, building trails with the Youth Conservation Corps, etc.)*

**Someone once said, “We can help ourselves by helping others.” What does that statement mean to you?**

*(Helping others gives the helper a good feeling. It also helps our society be a better place for us to live.)*

Here at school there are ways students are of service. **What are some of the ways you and other students help out at school?**

*(This varies from school to school but there are probably a dozen ways.)*

Organized service like we’ve been talking about is good because it is like a job that you commit yourself to. You’re scheduled for a time and people count on you. In return, you probably get some recognition and praise for your work. There is also service of another type, as when you see someone in trouble and you stop to help. This might be like seeing a frail older person on the side of the road with a flat tire, and you stop to help change the tire. Or it might be seeing a new person in school that looks a little lost, and you go up to them to welcome them and ask if you can help them find their room. Or it might be helping a mother with a baby in her arms pick up something she dropped.

Sometimes it’s a wonderful thing to just make an opportunity to perform a random act of kindness. This is a true story published in a book about character education.

In Raleigh, NC, six teenagers at a pizza place were eating their food and getting a little rowdy. Their boisterousness began to bother other customers. Finally, a woman who had been eating at the next table with her family got up, went over to the cashier, and then approached the teenager's table. They got quieter, a little defensive about what she might say.

"I just wanted to wish you a Happy New Year and good luck in school," she said. "And I took care of your bill."

The teens were flabbergasted and could hardly stammer out a thank you.

"You're all great kids," she added, "and we hope our kids grow up to be like you." With a smile, she turned and left.

The teens sat in stunned silence. It was the nicest unexpected thing anyone had ever done for them. They wanted to thank her, but didn't know who she was. After talking it over, they decided the way to show their thankfulness was to work hard in school and to do nice things for other people.

If you think about the times people have shown you an unexpected kindness, do you remember that you too probably felt kinder toward others and more likely to be helpful? So really, the ripple effect of a kind deed goes well beyond the actual person you help. You can take lots of pride in the good you add to the world when you help someone.

**What was one of the kindest things you remember someone doing for you?**

*(Repeat their answers for all to hear.)*

**What are some acts of kindness or service that you remember doing for someone else?**

*(Again, repeat their answers for others to hear.)*

**Do you remember the feeling you had after you did this? Did you notice the effect it had on the person you helped?**

*(It is helpful to make the point that sometimes we are thanked on the spot and sometimes our reward is just knowing that we have added good to the world.)*



## **SERVICE (1)**

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1. Simple ways of being nice often work best. Write a list of simple things you could do every day to help people and make them happy.

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2. Write about a time you surprised someone and made that person happy. How did the person feel and how did you feel?

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3. Write about a person you know who could use help. Figure out how you could help them. Decide when you will do this.

Who needs help? \_\_\_\_\_

How could you help? \_\_\_\_\_

When will you help? \_\_\_\_\_



## **SERVICE (2)**

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1. Many jobs include helping other people. Some day you may have a job that helps others. List at least five jobs you could have where you would help others.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ d) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_ e) \_\_\_\_\_  
c) \_\_\_\_\_ f) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you remember a time someone really helped you out when you couldn't take care of something by yourself? Write about this time and how you felt when the person helped you.

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3. Younger kids in your family or neighborhood or school look up to people your age. What are some ways you can be of service to them?

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# **CHARACTER EDUCATION SECONDARY (5-8) LESSONS**



# COOPERATION

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**What is cooperation?** Think about situations here at school and at home.

*(Helping with the work, trying to use everyone's ideas, encouraging all members to join in, doing your fair share of the work, compromising)*

Long ago people who wanted to be left alone to do their own thing could just set out for the wilderness and live off the land in a great degree of isolation and with minimal laws. Today we don't generally have that choice. We live in close contact with many people, and cooperation becomes very important.

**What are some of the ways people have to cooperate in a family?**

*(Share chores, take turns in the bathroom, be quiet when others are trying to sleep, make sure the food gets around to everyone fairly, discuss things that bother you so bad feelings don't get worse, compromise when decisions are made about what to do on a family outing)*

**What are some ways people cooperate at school?**

*(Wait in line in the cafeteria, raise your hand and wait your turn to talk in class, help clean up after an activity, listen when others are talking)*

**What are some ways people cooperate in our community?**

*(Follow the laws, vote when people have to be elected or decisions made, volunteer to do community service, report problems you observe to proper authorities, welcome new people to the neighborhood)*

**What are reasons for you to cooperate in these different situations?**

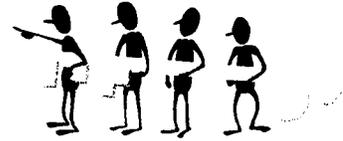
*(It's fairer, it produces peace and harmony, it makes things run smoother and more efficiently, it is a way to prevent problems, it makes others feel good and want to cooperate too, some things cannot be accomplished alone but only with the cooperation of others)*

A famous quote from Aesop, a well-known story-teller from long ago, says, "United we stand, divided we fall." This talks about cooperation from the point of view that it can be more than just trying to get along together; it can also be working together to make things happen that no one can do alone. **What are some things that can only be accomplished through cooperation?**

*(Playing games; building highways, schools and hospitals; defending our country; some projects around the home that are too big for one person; organizing a school dance or party; having a safe neighborhood)*

A famous proverb says, "Shared joys are doubled, shared sorrows are halved." **What do you think this means?**

*(Sharing the good and the bad with other people both have a benefit; the students might interpret what this benefit is or where it comes from - feeling supported, cared about, not being alone)*



## **COOPERATION (1)**

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How is working together different from working alone?

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What are the advantages of working together?

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What are the advantages of working alone?

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What is the meaning of the phrase, "Two heads are better than one"?

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What can you do to cooperate at home?

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What can you do to cooperate at school?

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## **COOPERATION (2)**

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When two people have a disagreement, how can they work out the problem cooperatively?

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When is cooperation hard for you personally?

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Think of someone at home or at school that you have a hard time cooperating with. What is the reason this is hard for you?

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Can you think of a way to help yourself become more cooperative with this person?

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## GOAL SETTING

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Tom Landry was the long time coach of the great Dallas Cowboys football team. His successful record with the Cowboys helps classify him as one of the great professional football coaches of all time. He worked hard and he inspired his players to always give 100%.

When asked in an interview about the secret of his success, he answered, "In 1958, I did something everyone who has been successful must do: I determined my priorities in life - God, family and then football."

Goals such as these described by Mr. Landry come from within yourself and enable you to overcome setbacks and hurdles. A strong inner desire and knowing your priorities helps you take the steps needed to keep moving in the direction of your dreams.

Inner desires and goals motivate us all. **What are the priorities that motivate you right now?**

*(Get one response from each student. Immediate priorities may include doing well in school, having friends, meeting parent's expectations, doing well in a sport or music, having a good reputation.)*

**What inner dreams do you have for the future?**

*(Get one response from each student. Longer range priorities may include having financial success, attaining a higher education, making the world a better place, having a happy family and home, being a good person, being famous.)*

In each area you may describe things in a broad way, as above, or a specific way. Broad is good as a way to set your compass, and specific is good as a way to encourage yourself that you are moving ahead. Specific immediate goals may include getting selected for a team or a performing group, improving a personal record as in running or swimming, or attaining a certain grade point average. Long-range goals may include going into a career as a health professional, being married with children and a nice home, or publishing a book.

**Which goals give us the most satisfaction when reached, easy or hard ones? Why?**

*(Repeat their responses for others to hear. Hard ones make us more proud of what we accomplish, generally speaking.)*

**What can we do if we set a goal and we don't achieve it?**

*(We can choose to try again with the same plan; change our plan and try again; change our goal a little - maybe reaching for a somewhat easier goal in the same direction, like being a dental assistant instead of a dentist; or drop this goal altogether. It depends on how important that goal really is to us and why we were unsuccessful.)*

**Can we only be successful if we reach all our goals?**

*(No. The important thing is to learn from everything we do and keep setting goals that will move us ahead in life. All famous and successful people had setbacks along the way, whether these are public knowledge or not.)*

**If we set a long-range goal, why would it be important to set short-term goals along the way?**

*(Every major accomplishment involves steps to get there. To sail around the world you have to learn to sail, earn money to buy a boat, research the best boat for your needs, buy the boat, plan for supplies and back-up support, etc. If you don't focus on some of these smaller steps for feelings of success, you won't find much encouragement for continuing.)*

## GOAL SETTING

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Goals work best if they are stated clearly:

- **WHAT** outcome you want,
- **WHY** you want it, and
- **THE STEPS** you will take to achieve the outcome.

Sometimes when we are planning, we leave out the "why." The "why" part of this plan is very important because if there is no "why," you don't have any fuel for the work needed to achieve your goal.

Some well-stated goals are:

In order to improve my grade in my social studies class (the **What**)

So I won't be embarrassed by a failing grade (the **Why**),

I'll look at the homework before I leave class to be sure I understand what to do (the **Steps**).

In order to make friends in my new school (the **What**)

So I will feel welcome and well liked (the **Why**),

I will find someone in my class who looks friendly and ask them if I can eat lunch at their table (the **Steps**).

In order to get the money I need for summer baseball camp (the **What**),

Where I can get good enough to make the team next year (the **Why**),

I'll ask my parents if I can earn it by doing extra chores (the **Steps**).

Because I don't like to miss the beginning of class (the **Why**),

I'll make sure I'm on time for school every day (the **What**)

By setting my alarm clock each night for 7:00 (the **Steps**).



## GOAL SETTING (1)

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Thinking about your life right now, rate your most important priorities (things that motivate you): (1=most important; 12=least important)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Looking good
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communicating better with my parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finding and making friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being independent
- \_\_\_\_\_ Making good grades
- \_\_\_\_\_ Liking who you are
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being with the "in" crowd
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finding the right guy or girl to date
- \_\_\_\_\_ Not caving in to peer pressure
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sports
- \_\_\_\_\_ Music
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

What is important to you in a job (number from 1 as most important to 5 for least important)?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Salary
- \_\_\_\_\_ Interesting and challenging
- \_\_\_\_\_ Service to others
- \_\_\_\_\_ Location
- \_\_\_\_\_ Coworkers

What is most important to you in your family?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Love and friendship
- \_\_\_\_\_ Loyalty
- \_\_\_\_\_ Laughter and having fun together
- \_\_\_\_\_ Understanding where you're coming from
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honesty

If you're going to achieve your goals, what do you need from the list below? (Choose two)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Self-confidence or courage
- \_\_\_\_\_ Encouragement from family and friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being unafraid to try something where you might fail
- \_\_\_\_\_ Desire or sense of purpose
- \_\_\_\_\_ Maturity or wisdom
- \_\_\_\_\_ Money



## **GOAL SETTING (2)**

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If you were to be listed in *Who's Who in America*, what would you want your entry to say?

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What would motivate you to want to achieve this recognition?

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What mental attitudes and skills would you have to develop to achieve this recognition?

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## **GOAL SETTING (3)**

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Write one goal that you would like to accomplish by the end of this semester.

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Dream big and write one goal you would like to accomplish by 10 years from now. Draw a picture of something that represents this goal on the back of this page. And write one behavior or skill you will need to use or learn in order to make this happen.

My 10-year goal in words:

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One behavior or skill that I will need to accomplish this goal:

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Draw a picture of your 10-year goal on the back of this page.

# HONESTY

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**Our word for today is honesty. What is the meaning of the word honesty?**

*(The basic idea is "telling the truth.")*

Besides telling the truth, it is also important to include in the meaning of "honesty" acting in ways that you don't intentionally mislead someone into thinking something that is not true. **Can anyone think of an example of behavior that does mislead someone into thinking something that is not true?**

*(One example is turning in homework that you copied from a friend with your name on it, because the teacher will think this is your own work. For the same reason, letting someone else copy your paper is dishonest.)*

**Is there someone you know with whom you feel you can be totally honest?** This might be a family member or friend or teacher or minister.

*(Wait for students to answer, encouraging them to share even if they would be more comfortable not using the person's name.)*

**What has this person done that has given you this feeling of confidence in them?**

*(Maybe they have been totally honest with you, and thus set the standard for your relationship. Maybe once you took a chance and confided in them and they were understanding, and this inspired you to trust them in the future.)*

Being totally honest with someone close to you is a very good feeling. You feel you are accepted and can be totally yourself. This gives you an immediate feeling of happiness. **But what about times when the issue involves people who are not close to you, who are maybe even strangers? Are there good reasons to be honest with them?**

*(Answers can encompass various levels of moral development, from:*

*"It's easier to tell the truth so I don't forget exactly what I said and get caught in a lie,"*

*to "I will get a bad reputation and won't be believed in the future,"*

*to "Lying can become a habit, so it's better not to start it in the first place,"*

*to "If you lie too often, you may start to believe your own lies; you won't even be honest with yourself,"*

*to "Our society is a much better place for all of us if people can be trusted to tell the truth, and that can only happen if each one of us is responsible for his own behavior and tells the truth.")*

**Are there times when it is better not being totally honest?**

*(This is asked to address the common situations where someone tells a "white lie" in order not to hurt someone's feelings or some other similar reason. Discuss that there may be times when certain moral standards are in conflict like this, and then it takes serious soul searching to come to the best decision. But any decision to abandon honesty should be done very carefully. Usually, if you are honest and at the same time care about the person in a way that they know this, their feelings will not be badly hurt. This will especially be true once they know they can trust you for an honest opinion all the time. Another thought, sometimes people just ask rhetorical questions and no answer is necessary.)*

**Can you think of a time someone lied to you?**

*(Of course they can.)*

**Would anyone like to share the situation? How did this lie make you feel at the time?**

*(Betrayed? Hurt? Angry?)*

**How did the lie affect your feelings about this person in the future?**

*(Less trusting? Angry? Resentful? Wanting to retaliate?)*

Lots of negative energy starts with a lie. The only way you can have a positive influence on the chain of events is to make a decision to always be truthful.

Honesty is a big part of a person's reputation. Your reputation is the opinion people have of you based on your past behavior. You know the story of the boy who cried wolf. Several times this

boy, who was watching sheep, called to the villagers to come to his aide to fend off a wolf. But there was no wolf. He just did it to see the villagers scurry about. After several times, they no longer believed him. Then came the day when there really was a wolf and no one came to his call.

**What does it take to have a reputation for honesty?**

*(Practicing honesty as a habit, never telling lies)*

**What does it take to earn a reputation for honesty if you have had a reputation for lying or cheating?**

*(A return to total honesty, and then it takes time till people are convinced that you have changed. An important thing to remember is that you can regain a reputation for honesty)*

**What are the advantages of having a reputation for honesty?**

*(Students' responses may be most interesting. Repeat them so all can hear.)*



## HONESTY (1)

Read each of the following statements and check how often you do this. Remember to be honest with yourself.

Statements	Always	Usually	Never
1. Copy a few answers from a classmate's paper			
2. Let someone I don't like take the blame for something I did			
3. Take something that doesn't belong to me from a friend who already has so much that they won't miss it			
4. Let parents, teachers, etc. make a mistake rather than helping them by speaking up			
5. Take something that doesn't belong to me from a store because the clerk is always unfriendly			
6. Copy from a classmate's paper rather than make a failing grade			
7. Let someone else copy from my paper			
8. Tell a lie rather than get in trouble			
9. Cheat in a game if I know I won't get caught			
10. Keep money that is given to me in error by a cashier			
11. Tell a lie to make myself appear to be a better person			
12. Help a friend steal by being the lookout who warns them someone is coming			



## HONESTY (2)

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Write about the following three situations. a. What is the thing to do to behave with honesty in this situation? b. Why is this important in this situation?

1. At a checkout counter, the clerk gives you more change than you have coming. You know that at the end of the day if the cash register is short, the difference comes out of her pocket.

a.

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b.

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2. You're with friends at school discussing the upcoming dance when someone compliments you on the decorations and your work on the dance committee. But you had nothing to do with this particular event.

a.

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b.

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3. You've seen people in your class cheating on a test.

a.

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b.

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## **HONESTY (3)**

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Write about a time when your conscience stopped you from behaving dishonestly.

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Write about a type of situation that comes up in which you want to behave more honestly in the future than you have in the past.

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# PERSEVERANCE

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**The character trait for this week is "perseverance." Who can tell me what "perseverance" means?**

*(Ideas might include patience, sticking to it, not giving up, determination.)*

Many famous people are known for their perseverance. This is because you cannot really achieve anything difficult enough to make you famous unless you exercise this character trait. Another of our character traits, Goal Setting, is one essential part of achieving success. A goal is the target that represents your destination. **The Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland told Alice when she asked him for directions but didn't know to where, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."** What do you think that means?

*(Answers might relate to: Without a goal your life may not turn out the way you want it to. Or you'll get lost along the way. Or you won't be a success. Or your life won't have much meaning.)*

Equally important to goal setting in getting where you want to go is perseverance. Just knowing what you want does not make it happen. **How many of you have wanted something that you did not get?**

*(Ask the students for responses, perhaps some "things" they wanted to have, a grade in a class, being selected for some team or activity, dating someone in particular.)*

**Did you put serious effort into this goal?**

*(Probably they will acknowledge that they did not, but a follow up question for those who have tried is "Can you think of other things you could have done to be more persistent in getting to this goal?" "How much did you want this goal?")*

**Who are some famous people you've heard of who must have had the quality of perseverance?**

*(See handout on Helen Keller. Other examples from history include Wilber and Orville Wright who tried many variations in their design for a flying machine before they were able to finally fly successfully. They're heavier than air machine took off on December 17, 1903 at Kitty Hawk, NC.)*

Most people who have goals that seem very difficult to achieve find a great deal of satisfaction in meeting shorter goals along the way. Helen Keller was so excited to finally discover that she could learn things. The distant goals of a college education and service to others, which she did finally achieve, were just an extension of the daily pleasures that she got out of learning new things.

The greatest achievements come when these two things are present:

1. A long term goal that you really want and
2. Steps for getting there (short term goals) that you really focus on, get into and enjoy.

Either one without the other makes it less likely that you will achieve as much.

Examples of one without the other:

(Short term without long term) Getting good grades in school if you don't see the connection with learning something that will make your life better in the long run (for a career or a lifelong interest)

(Long term without short term) Planning for a professional or technical type career if you don't see how today's effort in school will get you there.

(Long term without short term) Wanting to have better physical conditioning if you cannot get into the health habits that you will practice regularly.

(Short term without long term) Enjoying music class, but not realizing that learning to play an instrument well can be a very fulfilling hobby even if you don't become a professional performer.

You will find you can generate the greatest degree of perseverance when you have the combination of:

1. A long-range goal that makes your present effort important.
2. Enjoyment in reaching short-term goals there are steps along the way.

You won't find enough fuel for perseverance if you just look for things you enjoy doing at the moment. In addition, you won't find enough fuel if you just look at long-term goals in the distant future. You need things that work together to make both the present and the future meaningful.

The worksheet for today will give you a chance to think about how perseverance plays a part in your own life.

## PERSEVERANCE

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Helen Keller is an example of a famous person known for her perseverance. She was born with sight and hearing but became deaf and blind as a result of an illness at the age of two. Helen had a lot of spirit and was very difficult to live with and help because she became very frustrated and angry that she couldn't communicate. Her teacher, Ann Sullivan, became famous for helping her persevere. The breakthrough came when Helen was very thirsty and wanted a drink of water. Ann had spent a lot of time writing letters in Helen's palm trying to get the idea across that this could be a way to communicate. On this day, when Ann spelt the word "water" in Helen's palm, Helen finally understood. It was the most exciting day of her life - when she realized that there was a way to "see."

Ann's persistence in finally getting to this breakthrough day and both of their persistence in continuing their work together are testimonials to what can be accomplished with perseverance. Helen learned to "see" and "read" (Braille) and "hear" (putting her hands on people's mouths and necks to experience them talking), and actually speak (by imitating the mouth and neck movements that she felt others doing).

Helen once told wounded soldiers, "You have a problem, but everyone in the world has some sort of problem. Those who are determined to work hard can usually cope with their problems. Those who give up - those people who are not determined - are usually very unhappy. Don't let anything discourage you. Keep right on trying. Then you will do what you want to do and you will be happier."

In addition she once said, "The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome."



## **PERSEVERANCE (1)**

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1. Write about a personal obstacle you encountered and persevered through.

What was the obstacle?

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What were the setbacks you encountered?

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How did you feel when you encountered these setbacks?

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What did you do to get past the setbacks?

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How long did it take you to persevere?

---

---

Why did you keep trying?

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## **PERSEVERANCE (2)**

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2. Of all the people you know personally, who has the most perseverance? Tell about how they have shown their perseverance.

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3. Write about a time when you really wanted something but just did not do what was necessary to make it happen. What was it?

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What could you have done to persevere more toward this goal?

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If you like drawing, draw this goal on the back of this paper.



**PERSEVERANCE (3)**

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4. A scrapbook can be a good way to keep track of the milestones in your life. These are the things you have probably used perseverance to accomplish. List below things you have already done that you might like to put into your scrapbook.

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5. List here things you could plan to add to your scrapbook in the next two years.

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# RESPECT

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The theme for today is respect. **What are some words that are similar in meaning to respect?**

*(Responses might include courtesy, consideration, manners, and acceptance of differences, recognition, a positive opinion of someone, caring)*

**How is respect directed; who or what gets or should get respect?**

*(People of all types, one's self, social institutions, animals, the environment).*

We hear people talk about having respect for all people. But sometimes we have to remind ourselves that this is important when we come into contact with people who are different from ourselves. It is easier to understand people who look and act like us.

We can remind ourselves that all people are alike in some ways. **What are some of the ways all people are alike?**

*(Have same kinds of feelings, need food and water, need love and attention, etc.)*

**What are some ways people are different?**

*(Color of skin and hair, religious beliefs, skills, personalities, number of friends and interests, etc.)*

As long as people obey the law and respect others, realizing that we all share space in our communities and on this planet, then all of our lives are better.

Respect for yourself and respect for others go hand in hand. You can't really have one without the other. Let us talk about self-respect separately in order to make things clear.

Self-respect is the ability to value you and care for yourself. You have self-respect if you feel and think you are a valuable, worthwhile, good person who can offer a positive contribution to the world.

**What does a person with self-respect look like and how do they act?**

*(Answers might include walking tall, having good eye contact, having a firm voice, not getting easily upset, not being afraid to learn something new, not being afraid to state their opinion even when others disagree.)*

**How do people show respect?**

*Being polite and not belittling someone is one way.*

*Being on time to class shows respect for your teacher and the other students.*

*Keeping your yard neat shows respect for the neighbors.*

*Not talking out loud in movies shows respect for the other people in the audience.*

*Wearing clothes appropriate for an occasion shows respect for other people who are there.*

*Picking up trash outside your locker shows respect for your school.*

**What are some ways you see your elders teaching respect to young children as they are just beginning to understand?**

*They teach them to say please and thank you.*

*They teach them to wait their turn and not interrupt.*

*They teach them to share.*

*They teach them to pick up their toys when they're done playing.*

As we get older it is important to remember that all of these behaviors are always important.

# RESPECT

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Respect for others basically boils down to the golden rule, which has been stated in almost every religious and moral code since the beginning of man.

Aristotle:

We should behave to others as we wish others to behave to us.

Buddhism:

Hurt no others with that which pains thyself.

Christianity:

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.

Confucius:

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

Hinduism:

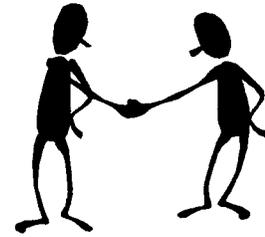
Do nothing to thy neighbor, which thou wouldst not have him do to thee thereafter.

Islam:

No one of you is a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

Judaism:

What you hate, do not do to anyone.



## **RESPECT (1)**

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List qualities of people that you like to be around.

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List qualities of people that you find hard to like or understand.

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List five examples of respectful behavior you have observed at school.

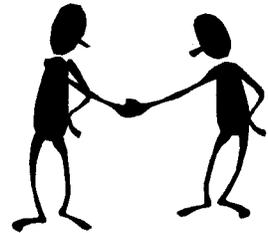
1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_



## RESPECT (2)

List five examples of respectful behavior you have observed at home.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Pick two of the situations from the ten above and describe how the other person or people in the situation were affected and responded after being shown respect.

For example if your Situation A.3. was, "I saw James welcome my mother to our school when she came to pick me up yesterday," then perhaps the impact on your mother was, "She smiled and said, "Thank you", and seemed to feel very pleased. In fact, afterward she was more pleasant to me than usual."

Situation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Situation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is one situation or one person where you feel you should show more respect than you have in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# RESPONSIBILITY

---

Responsibility is a big word. It's not just big in the number of letters but in the range of meanings, people assign to it. It is used very often by adults when they talk to children and teens. **What are some of the things people mean when they talk about behaving responsibly?**

*(Following the rules, admitting when you're at fault, completing your chores or assignments on time, using self-control, taking care of something that needs to be done without being told, doing what you say you will do)*

**Who in your life depends on you to be responsible? What ways do they expect you to be responsible?**

*(Adults - parents and teachers - tend to expect all of the above behaviors. In addition, people have a responsibility to their friends, neighbors, and members of their church, the community as a whole. Ask the students for specific responsibilities that the adults in their lives have made a big deal about.)*

**What are some of the problems that arise when people do not meet their responsibilities in certain ways? For example:**

Being on time with chores or assignments

*(It makes other people have to wait on you; sometimes missing a deadline causes some opportunity to be missed altogether, like not taking out the garbage before it is to be picked up; if you let things wait you're more likely to forget to do them)*

Admitting when you're at fault

*(Someone else may be blamed or have to do the work to make up for the mistake; time and energy will be wasted trying to find out what happened; you will get in the habit of trying to find the easy way out, and later on admitting your mistakes will just be harder)*

Following the rules

*(Other people will think it's not fair if not everyone is following the rules and they will be tempted to not follow them also, which in the long run will lead to chaos and make all our lives more difficult; like above, ignoring the rules can become a habit that will get you into more and more trouble as you go through life; you won't be able to feel any real satisfaction for things you accomplish by getting around the rules; you'll develop a reputation that you cannot be trusted)*

Using self-control

*(Over-reacting can make a little problem into a big one; on a job, lack of self control might get you fired; if you're being asked some questions by a policeman, lack of self-control might get you arrested even if there is no other reason to arrest you)*

Doing what you say you'll do

*(If you don't, people won't trust you in the future; someone else may be very disappointed or get in trouble)*

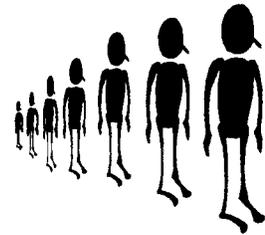
Taking care of something that needs to be done without being told

*(Sometimes no one else will even be aware of what is happening and if you don't take care of it yourself, it won't get taken care of; the time delay in waiting for someone else to do it may make the situation worse; the other person may have other things to do and not have nearly as easy a time taking care of this as you would)*

**Who do you depend on for certain things? How do you feel if they don't come through?**

*(Parents remembering your birthday, teachers grading and returning your assignments, friends being happy to see you)*

It's easy to see how much better our lives are when everyone is responsible. The thing you can do about that is be responsible yourself. The only person whose behavior you can control is your own.

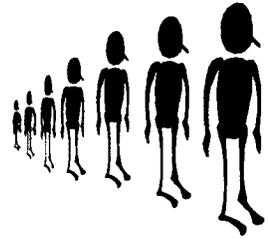


## RESPONSIBILITY (1)

### What is their responsibility?

Can you name three responsibilities for each person on the list?

Father			
Mother			
Child			
Grandparent			
Principal			
Teacher			
Student			
Doctor			
Pilot			
Mail carrier			
Police officer			
Coach			
Trash collector			
Friend			
Baby sitter			
Zookeeper			
Add your own			

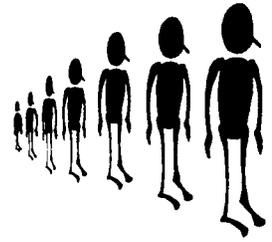


## RESPONSIBILITY (2)

### Am I responsible?

Rate yourself on the following statements by checking the correct answers. **Be honest!**

Statement	Always	Usually	Never
1. I keep up with all my assignments.			
2. I follow class and school rules.			
3. I do my chores at home.			
4. I do chores without being told.			
5. I help even when I am not asked to.			
6. I take care of my belongings.			
7. I think through decisions.			
8. I can admit my mistakes.			
9. My family trusts me.			
10. I take care of my health.			
11. I try to be on time.			
12. People can count on me.			



## **RESPONSIBILITY (3)**

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Complete the following

1. I am responsible at home and at school in the following ways:

---

---

2. I feel I need to improve in the following ways:

---

---

3. Someone else who would really like to see a change in me is \_\_\_\_\_  
and they would like to see the following change in me:

---

---

4. Think about a time when you forgot to do something important. What happened as a result?

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---

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# SELF-ESTEEM

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People use the word self esteem a lot these days. **What does this word mean to you?**

*(Feeling good about yourself, liking yourself, having confidence, etc.)*

**When you think about the other students in your classes, do you notice differences in their levels of self-esteem? What is there about them that you notice?**

*(Ask them not to use real names, but to describe how these students behave or look. For example, someone with low self esteem might look downward a lot, use a soft voice, dress in a careless way, etc. Someone with high self-esteem would probably have the opposite characteristics.)*

**Where do you think good self-esteem comes from? Are you born with it? Is it the same all through your life? Is it the same day in and day out, all the time?**

*(If the students don't make these points, say...) Self-esteem accumulates as you live, learn to do things, and have positive experiences. It also grows as you come to appreciate that the things that make you special and unique are interesting and good instead of bad. And it varies somewhat from time to time. When you're feeling good, rested and well fed and wearing clothes you feel good in, you tend to have more self-confidence than otherwise.*

So this can give you some ideas of ways you can control your own self-esteem.

The more you stick your neck out to learn to do something that's hard to learn,

The more you make decisions where you can feel good about the consequences,

The more time you spend around people who encourage you and like you just for who you are,

The more you take care of yourself and are strong and healthy,

The more your self-esteem will grow.

**What is something you had to work hard to learn to do that added to your self-esteem?**

*(Repeat their answers for all to hear.)*

**What other circumstances or events or people have added to your self-esteem?**

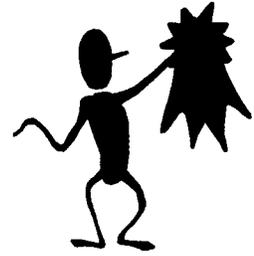
*(You might share something from your own life to give the students food for thought.)*

There is also something I'd like to say about those times when your self-esteem takes a hit. That might be when you get a lower grade than you expected, or when you don't get selected for something you try out for, or when someone says something that puts you down or hurts your feelings. **What are other circumstances that can give self-esteem a hit?**

*(Repeat any responses so all can hear.)*

**There are things you can do at these times to get your self-esteem back up as soon as possible. What are things you can think of?**

*(Walk proud so your manner lets everyone know that you still have self-confidence, even if it's hurting at the moment. Be patient and tell yourself that this is just a temporary situation or this is just one person, that other situations and other people will be different. Figure out what you can do to correct a mistake or to perform better in the future. Realize that everyone has a special menu of talents; being happy amounts to making the most of yours.)*



## **SELF-ESTEEM (1)**

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1. Who is a person in your life that has helped your self-esteem grow and how have they helped?

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2. What is something you learned to do that helped your self-esteem grow?

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3. What is something you're trying to learn that will help your self-esteem grow more?

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4. What have you done to this point in your life that you're the proudest of?

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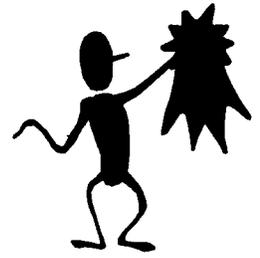
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5. What is one unique thing about yourself that you really like and are proud of?

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## SELF-ESTEEM (2)

In the following chart, make a check mark in each box that describes how the person sees you.

	Parent	Teacher	Friend	Yourself
Neat and clean				
Happy				
Funny				
Hard working				
Trustworthy				
Good				
Smart				
Helpful				
Talkative				
Brave				
Good listener				
Angry sometimes				
Follows rules				
Ambitious				

## SERVICE

---

The word for today is service. When we hear this word we probably think about things like serving food at a homeless shelter or packing sandbags when a river floods or visiting a nursing home to talk to patients there. **What are some other ways you know of that people perform service?**

*(Collecting clothing or food for charities, helping older people in the neighborhood with chores around the house or yard, volunteering at a hospital, volunteering with organizations like the Red Cross or the Salvation Army, building houses with Habitat for Humanity, building trails with the Youth Conservation Corps, etc.)*

A famous quote by a person famous for living a life of service, Eleanor Roosevelt, goes like this, "When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die." Service is very much a part of American culture. More than in most countries, Americans volunteer their time for good causes. **Someone once said, "We can help ourselves by helping others." What does that statement mean to you?"**

*(Helping others gives the helper a good feeling. It also helps our society be a better place for us to live.)*

**If you were going to volunteer your time to a good cause, what kind of work would you like to do?**

*(Repeat their answers for all to hear.)*

Organized service like the one we've been talking about is good because it is like a job that you commit yourself too. You're scheduled for a time and people count on you. In return, you probably get some recognition and praise for your work. There is also service of another type, as when you see someone in trouble and you stop to help. This might be like seeing a frail older person on the side of the road with a flat tire, and you stop to help change the tire. Or it might be seeing a new person in school that looks a little lost, and you go up to them to welcome them and ask if you can help them find their room. Or it might be helping a mother with a baby in her arms pick up something she dropped.

Sometimes it's a wonderful thing to just make an opportunity to perform a random act of kindness. This is a true story published in a book about character education.

In Raleigh, NC, six teenagers at a pizza place were eating their food and getting a little rowdy. Their boisterousness began to bother other customers. Finally, a woman who had been eating at the next table with her family got up, went over to the cashier, and then approached the teenager's table. They got quieter, a little defensive about what she might say.

"I just wanted to wish you a Happy New Year and good luck in school," she said. "And I took care of your bill."

The teens were flabbergasted and could hardly stammer out a thank you.

"You're all great kids," she added, "and we hope our kids grow up to be like you." With a smile, she turned and left.

The teens sat in stunned silence. It was the nicest unexpected thing anyone had ever done for them. They wanted to thank her, but didn't know who she was. After talking it over, they decided the way to show their thankfulness was to work hard in school and to do nice things for other people.

If you think about the times people have shown you an unexpected kindness, do you remember that you too probably felt more empathic toward others and more inclined to be helpful? So really, the ripple effect of a kind deed goes well beyond the actual person you help. You can take lots of pride in the good you add to the world when you help someone.

**What was one of the kindest things you remember someone doing for you?**

*(Repeat their answers for all to hear.)*

**What are some acts of kindness or service that you remember doing for someone else?**

*(Again, repeat their answers for others to hear.)*

**Do you remember the feeling you had after you did this? Did you notice the effect it had on the person you helped?**

*(It is helpful to make the point that sometimes we are thanked on the spot and sometimes our reward is just knowing that we have added good to the world.)*



## SERVICE

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1. What are some ways you could serve your community that you would enjoy doing?

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2. What are some things you have done in the past that helped a person or a group, and how did you feel?

Your action	Your Feelings

3. What are some things you remember someone doing to help you, and how did you feel?

Their action	Your Feelings

4. What are some volunteer activities you might be interested in doing in the future, and why would you like to do this activity?

Activity	Why?

5. Who are some people you know that could use your help, and how could you help them?

Person	How you could help?

6. Younger kids in your family or neighborhood or school look up to people your age. What are some ways you can be of service to them? Or, how can you help them achieve some of their dreams?

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# **STUDENT SELECTION**



**REFERRALS TO TRUANCY COURT  
AND  
THE FAMILY COURT OF ST. LOUIS COUNTY**

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**Truancy Court**

The St. Louis County Truancy Court is a voluntary, early intervention program intended to increase school attendance in an effort to divert students with a pattern of absences from The Family Court of St. Louis County. As a result, it targets those children who are at risk of further truancy. Each Truancy court can accommodate up to 15 students. Appropriate referrals to Truancy Court are those students who:

- Have 10 to 15 excused or unexcused absences from school the previous academic year;
- Do not have an open case with the Family Court of St. Louis County or Missouri Division of Family Services (as evidenced by a record check conducted by each agency);
- Are, along with their parent(s), willing to participate.

The following students are not appropriate for Truancy Court:

- Those who have previously participated in the Truancy Court Program and have continued absences;
- Those who have more than 15 absences;
- Those from families with historic and complex issues such as serious mental illness.

**Family Court of St. Louis County**

The Family Court of St. Louis County has exclusive original jurisdiction over children who, while subject to compulsory school attendance, are repeatedly and without justification absent from school. In Missouri, children between the ages of seven and sixteen are subject to compulsory school attendance.

Initially, it is the school's responsibility to identify absentee students and to intervene to resolve the problem as quickly as possible. It is also important that school personnel document their

efforts to improve attendance. When the school has exhausted its resources and the student continues to be truant, a referral can and should be made to the Family Court using the attached referral form. It is very important for the school to differentiate between excused and unexcused absences when referring a case to the Court. Appropriate referrals to the Family Court include:

- Students who have ten or more unexcused absences and documented interventions by the school have not changed the pattern of absenteeism;
- Students who have participated in Truancy Court and continue to be absent;
- Students who are chronically absent and parent(s) have not been responsive to school efforts;
- Students who have numerous excused absences in addition to unexcused absences.

When referring to the Family Court, it is important to remember:

- To send the referral as early in the school year as possible;
- To include all of the information requested on the referral form;
- To differentiate between excused and unexcused absences (include an attendance printout with a description of the codes used by the school);
- To send the referral well before the student's sixteenth birthday to allow the Court time to intervene.

## STUDENT SCREENING FOR TRUANCY COURT PARTICIPATION

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SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*NOTE:* Eligible students include those with 10 – 15 annual absences who lack historic and complex issues such as mental illness. Students with more than 15 absences should be referred to Family Court for truancy. Students with open cases at Family Court and/or DFS will be removed from participant list.

**STUDENTS WITH 10 – 15 ABSENCES LAST YEAR (approximately 5 – 7 absences per semester):**

Last Name, First Name	DOB	# Absences Last Year	
		Excused	Unexcused
1. _____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____	_____
8. _____	_____	_____	_____
9. _____	_____	_____	_____
10. _____	_____	_____	_____
11. _____	_____	_____	_____
12. _____	_____	_____	_____
13. _____	_____	_____	_____
14. _____	_____	_____	_____
15. _____	_____	_____	_____
16. _____	_____	_____	_____
17. _____	_____	_____	_____
18. _____	_____	_____	_____
19. _____	_____	_____	_____
20. _____	_____	_____	_____

**RETURN TO:**

Christy Duncker  
 Family Court of St. Louis County  
 501 So. Brentwood Blvd.  
 Clayton, MO 63105  
 Phone: 314-615-4562  
 Fax: 314-615-4477  
 Email: [Christy\\_Duncker@stlouisco.com](mailto:Christy_Duncker@stlouisco.com)





## ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT

6038 Caroline Avenue, Berkeley, Missouri 63134  
Phone (314) 522-0867, ext. 264  
Fax (314) 524-8336

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We invite you to participate in an exciting new program to help maximize your child's success in school. Utilizing a committed team of professionals, the goal of the Truancy Court is to ensure each child in select St. Louis County schools has access to the best education a school district can provide.

Our staff at \_\_\_\_\_ School has identified your child, \_\_\_\_\_, as a student who is beginning to exhibit a pattern of excessive absences and/or tardies. We would like to work with your family to rectify this often overlooked, but serious issue. Our experiences with similar situations have shown that unless dealt with in the early stages, this pattern will worsen, leading to more complicated and serious difficulties in the future. It is the school's desire to improve your child's attendance and avoid making written referrals to the Family Court and the Division of Family Services for such cases.

We urge your family to participate in this voluntary program where you and your child will meet weekly with the Truancy Court judge and team at our school. For further information about your child's attendance and the Truancy Court program at our school, please contact our Family Advocate, \_\_\_\_\_, at phone number \_\_\_\_\_.

We look forward to getting to know you and your family as we work together to develop and implement innovative strategies for your child's academic success.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal



**ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT DIVERSION PROJECT**  
**Consent Form**

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**Parental or guardian acceptance of the program activities is required prior to your child's participation in the St. Louis County Truancy Court Diversion Project. Please READ AND INITIAL each of the following so we may provide opportunities/services to your child.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian), grant permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (student's full name), to participate in the St. Louis County Truancy Court diversion project at \_\_\_\_\_ School. Truancy Court activities include weekly "court" sessions held at my child's school, an interview to identify needs, snacks/meals and incentives, field trips, "family fun activities," and aftercare group sessions.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to cooperate with the Truancy Court program. As a component of the program, I will make a clear and concerned effort to have my children in school, on time, daily. I understand that I am expected to attend weekly court sessions with my child, and to participate in a "family fun activity" and other support programs.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give the Truancy Court staff permission to communicate regarding the services offered to my child and me. Truancy Court staff includes school district personnel; the volunteer judge; St. Louis County Family Court; and Youth in Need. I understand that all records and information regarding services will be protected by regulations that govern the exchange of confidential information. I further understand that Truancy Court staff are required to comply with laws regarding mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, neglect, or assessment that there is danger of serious harm to self or others.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission the Truancy Court staff to photograph and/or film my child to aid in service delivery and/or for publication in promotional materials regarding Truancy Court. I understand that photographs used for promotional purposes will not include my child's name unless I provide additional written consent.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate and my child has permission to participate in an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Truancy Court program, including written surveys, interviews, and review of school records for one year before and one year after participation in the program. This evaluation will be administered by University of Missouri – St. Louis. I understand that all information will remain confidential and that individual responses will be reported anonymously in any reports generated by the program.

This authorization to receive Truancy Court services and to exchange confidential information will remain in effect for twelve (12) months. This release may be revoked at any time if requested in writing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT DIVERSION PROJECT**  
**Student Assessment**

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

STUDENT: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent (1): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent (2): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHICS:**

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Special Education</i>	<i>Voluntary Transfer</i>	<i>Parent HS Graduate</i>

**ATTENDANCE HISTORY:**

Number of absences last semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of tardies last semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Days suspended last semester: \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT/FAMILY STRENGTHS:**

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**PRESENT CONCERNS:**

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**GOALS FOR TRUANCY COURT:**

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

**Family Member Interviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's estimate of student's number of absences: \_\_\_\_\_

**FAMILY PROFILE**

Living situation, household composition	Marital status, child custody
Employment, financial situation	Family health/psych problems

**STUDENT PROFILE**

School situation (strengths and concerns)	Support system & peer relationships
Response to family discipline	Health

**COMMON CONCERNS**

Psych history (counseling, hospitalization, meds)	Substance use/abuse (student and/or family)
Family violence, abuse, neglect	Other losses (e.g., deaths, incarcerations)





## ST. LOUIS COUNTY TRUANCY COURT

6038 Caroline Avenue, Berkeley, Missouri 63134

Phone (314) 522-0867, ext. 264

Fax (314) 524-8336

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

This letter is to document that you chose to reject participation in the St. Louis County Truancy Court Diversion Project that was offered to your child, \_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ School.

According to the school's records, your child was absent \_\_\_\_\_ days thus far this year. Additional absences could result in a referral to Family Court and/or the Division of Family Services for formal court action.

Please contact me at phone: \_\_\_\_\_ if you have further questions about your child's attendance or the Truancy Court program at our school.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal/Family Advocate

cc: Student's File



**FAMILY COURT  
OF ST. LOUIS COUNTY**  
501 South Brentwood Boulevard  
Clayton, Missouri 63105  
(314) 615-4400

**Truancy/Educational Neglect  
Referral Form**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CHILD/FAMILY INFORMATION**

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_

Address (street, city, zip) \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

	Mother	Father	Other: guardian or step parent in home
Name			
Address			
Home phone			
Work phone			

**SCHOOL INFORMATION**

Referring School \_\_\_\_\_ - School District \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Name of contact person \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTENDANCE INFORMATION FOR CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR;**

Date of current enrollment \_\_\_\_\_ Total school days possible to date \_\_\_\_\_

Number of unexcused absences (distinguish between days/hours) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of suspension days \_\_\_\_\_ Number of excused absences \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach attendance printout and code for distinguishing between excused/unexcused absences.

(Over) →

**In a narrative form, please address the following categories (use additional paper, if necessary):**

1. Specific reasons for the child's failure to attend school, and reasons given for the absences;

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2. Any information about the child's home situation that you think would be helpful to the Court;

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3. Steps the school has taken to correct the problem. Attach copies of documents or correspondence.

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# **WEEKLY FORMS**



## TRUANCY COURT

### WEEKLY REPORT CARD

**TEACHERS:** Please comment on this student's performance during the dates listed below. The judge will give your feedback directly to the student and parent(s) in attendance. Your positive remarks will be announced to all in attendance at Truancy Court.

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
 Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Immediate Improvement
<b>Academics</b>				
<b>Behavior</b>				
<b>Preparation</b>				

1) **Compared to last week, this student's overall performance in my class has:**  
 Much Improved     Improved     Remained the Same     Declined

2) **Please check if the following applies to the student's performance this week:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Absent _____ days.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Tardy _____ days.                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participates in class.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Displays positive attitude.           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Takes active role in class activities. | <input type="checkbox"/> Uses class time productively.         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asked me for help.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Received a good grade on a test/quiz. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turned in all assignments on time.     | <input type="checkbox"/> Missing assignment: _____             |

3) **Please name at least one positive thing you noticed about the student this past week:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please promptly return to \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_**



# TRUANCY COURT

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

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

**I agree to do the following:**

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Judge**

(Original to student's Truancy Court file. Yellow carbon to student. Pink carbon to counselor/teacher.)



**TRUANCY COURT  
SIGN-IN SHEET**

---

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

NOTE: Please print the name of each participant attending Court today. Thank you!

STUDENT

FAMILY MEMBER

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	





ST. LOUIS COUNTY  
TRUANCY COURT

6038 Caroline Avenue, Berkeley, Missouri 63134  
Phone (314) 522-0867, ext. 264  
Fax (314) 524-8336

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

Dear Parent:

I am sorry that you were unable to attend Truancy Court today. It is important to us and your child that you attend court whenever possible because your presence will at the very least have a direct positive effect on your child's day. You will also receive information about your child's daily performance in the classroom.

Please contact Family Advocate: \_\_\_\_\_, at phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
for updates on your child's progress in Truancy Court and/or if you need assistance to attend.

Thank you for your efforts to help your child receive the best education possible. I hope to see you at the next Truancy Court to be held on \_\_\_\_\_  
at \_\_\_\_\_: \_\_\_\_\_ AM at the school.

Sincerely,

Truancy Court Judge



# **EVALUATION**



## **EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

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The University of Missouri–St. Louis is conducting a three-year independent evaluation of the St. Louis County Truancy Court Diversion Project. Providing pre-project, post-project and long-term impact evaluations are essential to properly meet the needs of our targeted students and families. The evaluation is also required by the Safe Schools grant that funds the Truancy Court program.

Participating schools must provide the following information for this evaluation:

- School enrollment, attendance rate, free/reduced lunch rate, and number of suspensions and violence/discipline referrals
- Participating student demographics, attendance, discipline and grade reports
- List of all direct services and referrals provided to the participating families
- Pre- and post-surveys completed by students, families, and faculty

Semester data is required for the year during Truancy Court, as well as one year before and one year after Truancy Court. Sample evaluation forms are included for your reference.



**TRUANCY COURT**  
**Comparative Data - Grant Requirement**

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School: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>2001-2002</b>	<b>Semester 1 Fall 2001</b>	<b>Semester 2 Winter 2002</b>	<b>2001-2002 Year Totals</b>
	General Student Population	General Student Population	General Student Population
Attendance rate (%)			
Number of violence & discipline referrals			
Number of In-school suspensions			
Number of Out-of-school suspensions			
Free & reduced lunch rate			
Enrollment			
<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>Semester 1 Fall 2002</b>	<b>Semester 2 Winter 2003</b>	<b>2002-2003 Year Totals</b>
	General Student Population	General Student Population	General Student Population
Attendance rate (%)			
Number of violence & discipline referrals			
Number of In-school suspensions			
Number of Out-of-school suspensions			
Free & reduced lunch rate			
Enrollment			



## TRUANCY COURT Student Evaluation Data

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Person completing this form: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHICS:**

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Special Education</i>	<i>Voluntary Transfer</i>	<i>Parent HS Graduate</i>

**DATA:**

<i>Semester</i>	<i># Days Enrolled</i>	<i># Full-Day Absences (exclude suspensions)</i>	<i># Partial Absences</i>	<i># Tardies</i>	<i>Days Suspended</i>		<i>#Discipline Referrals</i>	<i>Grade Point Average</i>
					<i>ISS</i>	<i>OSS</i>		
Fall 01/02								
Sp 01/02								
<b>Fall 02/03</b>								
Sp 02/03								
Fall 03/04								
Sp 03/04								

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide semester data for the year before, during and after Truancy Court. Include printouts of student's school records: attendance, discipline, and grades.  
**RETURN TO:** Truancy Court, 6038 Caroline Ave, Berkeley, MO 63134, 314-522-0867

## Student Survey

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SAS Pre-Post

**Circle the word that tells how you feel about each statement.**

1. I want to do well in school.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

2. If I study, I can learn.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

3. A high school diploma is important.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

4. School is a waste of time.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

5. I will succeed in school.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

6. Learning is important.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

7. Schoolwork is interesting to me.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

8. Making up missed schoolwork is important.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

9. School is the best place for me to learn.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

10. I will graduate from high school.

Yes      Maybe      Probably not      No

## Student Survey

---

PI Pre-Post

**Think about the adults in your home. Circle the word that best answers each statement.**

1. An adult in my home checks to see if I am ready for school in the morning.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

2. An adult in my home sees that I get to school on time.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

3. I talk to an adult in my home about things that happen in school.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

4. An adult in my home helps me with my homework.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

5. An adult in my home talks to my teachers about my schoolwork.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

6. An adult in my home comes to school for Parent-Teacher Conferences.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

7. My family comes to school events like plays, fairs, or fun nights.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

8. An adult in my home comes to Truancy Court with me.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

9. An adult in my home talks to me about what happened at Truancy Court.

Always                      Usually                      Sometime                      Never

10. The adult I'm talking about in these statements is my (please circle the correct person or persons).

Dad    Mom    Step-parent    Grandparent    Older brother/sister    Guardian    Other

## Student Survey

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CED Pre-Post

**Circle the word that best answers each statement.**

1. I respect the ideas and feelings of others, even if they are different from mine.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
2. I finish what I start, even if it is hard.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
3. I cheat in school.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
4. I come to school and am on time for my classes.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
5. I get along with others, even when they are not like me.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
6. I tell the truth.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
7. When I have a goal, I keep working until I reach it.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
8. I do things that are good for my body and mind.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
9. I take responsibility for my actions, even when I do things that I shouldn't have done.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never
10. I work well in a group, either in school or with my friends.  
Always                  Usually                  Sometime                  Never

TRUANCY COURT POST-SURVEY

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the first seven statements, and then answer the additional group of questions that apply to you.

Circle your response.

I am a: Parent or Family Member Teacher Student in Truancy Court

1. Students participating in the Truancy Court program are getting a good education. Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

2. Students served in the Truancy Court program are doing better (academically and behaviorally) than they were before entering the program. Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

3. Parents are involved in making decisions about their child's participation in the Truancy Court program. Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

4. Because of the Truancy Court program, the school is safer and students are learning more. Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

5. I would give the Truancy Court a grade of: A B C D F

6. The thing I liked best about Truancy Court was \_\_\_\_\_

7. Truancy Court would be better if \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENTS ONLY - PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 8 & 9

8. Mark the things you liked about Truancy Court.

- \_\_\_ The chance to improve my attendance \_\_\_ The people on the Truancy Court Team
\_\_\_ The encouragement to improve my grades \_\_\_ Having my family involved at school
\_\_\_ Family Fun Night \_\_\_ The field trip
\_\_\_ The incentives (T-shirts, clocks, pens, etc.) \_\_\_ Breakfast
\_\_\_ Having the Judge announce my good efforts \_\_\_ The extra help I got for my schoolwork

9. Do you think you have changed since the beginning of Truancy Court? Yes No

If you answered "Yes", what kind of changes have you noticed in yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_

If you answered "No", why do you think you haven't changed?

\_\_\_\_\_

GENERAL COMMENTS:

\_\_\_\_\_

(PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS & TEACHERS - SEE OTHER SIDE)

**PARENTS OR FAMILY MEMBERS ONLY - PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 10 - 14**

10. Did participating in Truancy Court change anything about your child? Yes No

If "Yes", what kind of changes did you see? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Did Truancy Court change any of your ideas about school, teachers, or about education? Yes No

If "Yes", how? \_\_\_\_\_

If "No", why not? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Did Truancy Court increase your involvement in your child's education? Yes No

If "Yes", how? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Did Truancy Court change your relationship with your child? Yes No

If "Yes", how? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Were you able to attend any of the Truancy Court Sessions? Yes No If "Yes", how many? \_\_\_\_\_

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**TEACHERS ONLY - PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 15 - 18**

15. What kinds of changes, if any, have you noticed in the Truancy Court students?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. What kinds of changes, if any, have you noticed in the involvement of parents or family members with the students' education?  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. Were you able to attend any of the Truancy Court sessions? Yes No If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

18. In reference to Truancy Court, please share your thoughts on:

school administrative support \_\_\_\_\_

the weekly report sheets \_\_\_\_\_

communication with the Truancy Court Team \_\_\_\_\_

the Truancy Court Program \_\_\_\_\_

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE RETURN TO \_\_\_\_\_ BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_  
(Family Advocate) (Date)

# **RESOURCES**



## **TRUANCY COURT INCENTIVES**

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Contact Shonda Miller at 314-522-0867, extension 264 or [smiller3@fergflor.k12.mo.us](mailto:smiller3@fergflor.k12.mo.us) to request incentives such as the following:

### **Basic School Supplies**

\_\_\_\_\_ Truancy Court Logo Pens  
\_\_\_\_\_ Designer Pencils  
\_\_\_\_\_ Pencil Sharpeners  
\_\_\_\_\_ Colored Pencils  
\_\_\_\_\_ Pencil Pouch  
\_\_\_\_\_ Note Books  
\_\_\_\_\_ Erasers

### **Educational Incentives**

\_\_\_\_\_ Student Dictionary  
\_\_\_\_\_ Calculator  
\_\_\_\_\_ Certificates

### **Time Management Incentives**

\_\_\_\_\_ Alarm Clocks (for 1<sup>st</sup> court session)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Wrist Watches (for graduation)

### **Recreational Incentives**

\_\_\_\_\_ Frisbees  
\_\_\_\_\_ Balls  
\_\_\_\_\_ Stickers

### **Teacher Incentives**

\_\_\_\_\_ Fortune Cookies  
\_\_\_\_\_ Logo pens and certificates also recommended

### **Family Incentives**

\_\_\_\_\_ Thermometers  
\_\_\_\_\_ Logo pens and certificates also recommended

**Family Court of St. Louis County will also provide reimbursements for Truancy Court incentives and refreshments purchased by the school.** The amount available is defined per district according to the funds received by the JAIBG grant. Contact Christy Duncker at 314-615-4562 or [Christy\\_Duncker@stlouisco.com](mailto:Christy_Duncker@stlouisco.com) for more information about reimbursements.



## TRUANCY COURT LIBRARY

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Contact Shonda Miller at 314-522-0867, extension 264 or [smiller3@fergflor.k12.mo.us](mailto:smiller3@fergflor.k12.mo.us) to check out reference books such as the following:

- Blythe, E., & Milner, J. (Eds.) (1999). *Improving School Attendance*.
- Collins, D. (1998). *Managing Truancy in Schools* In R. Ribbins and J. Sayer (eds.).  
*Management and Leadership in Education Series*
- Gottfredson, D.C. (2001). *Schools and Delinquency*.
- Reid, K. (2000). *Tackling Truancy in Schools: A practical manual for primary and secondary schools*.
- Reid, K. (2000). *Truancy and Schools*.
- Vernon, J., & Sinclair, R. (1998). *Maintaining Children in School: The contribution of social services departments*.



## **OVERVIEW OF TRUANCY**

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### **Definition of Truancy:**

- Truancy is defined as an absence from school that is not excused by the parent/guardian or the school. The specific number of unexcused absences required before a student is labeled a chronic truant varies according to state law.

### **National Scope of the Issue:**

- Between the years 1989 and 1998 there was a national increase of 85% in petitioned truancy status offense cases handled by juvenile courts (from 22,200 to 41,000). This represents a 61% increase in the rate of truancy cases.
- Truancy cases comprised 26% of all status offense cases handled in 1998.
- Truancy is considered to be one of the top 10 problems facing schools.
- While there is not an abundance of national truancy data, some metropolitan areas report 1,000's of unexcused absences each day.
- In public schools, the absentee rate was highest in urban schools and lowest in rural schools. Absentee rates generally increased with rates of student poverty as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
- During the 1996-97 school year, student absenteeism, tardiness, or class cutting 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 (increased from 39% to 52%).
- By the year 2020, the majority of students in America's public schools will be living in circumstances traditionally regarded as placing them at risk of educational failure.

### **Truancy as a Predictor of Delinquency and Other Problems**

- Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.
- Lack of commitment to school has been established by several studies as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.
- As early as the 1800's, social reformers recognized the link between truancy and delinquency.
- In 1942, a pair of researchers conducted a detailed study of delinquency patterns in Chicago. They found that the frequency of delinquent behavior closely matched the incidents of truancy.
- A longitudinal study conducted in St. Louis over a 30-year period (ending in 1966) showed that early truancy was clearly related to adult criminality, violence, marital problems and job problems.
- In a study of prison inmates conducted in 1986, 89% had a history of school truancy.
- In 1991 and again in 1993, three grand juries in Dade County, Florida analyzed the data from more than 5,000 of the county's most serious juvenile offenders and found that excessive truancy was one of the three traits most of these juveniles had in common. Several studies also documented that between 75 and 85 % of the serious juvenile offenders had been truant or chronically absent from school.
- High rates of truancy are linked to high daytime burglary rates and high vandalism. In San Diego, 44 % of violent juvenile crime occurs between 8:30 a.m. and 1: 30 p.m.

# OVERVIEW OF TRUANCY

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## The Social and Financial Impact of Truancy

- Studies have indicated that students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest achievement rates. Low achievement has been shown to be an important predictor of substance abuse, delinquency, and early sexual intercourse.
- The consequences of dropping out are well documented. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed. They are more likely to be welfare dependent and more frequently experience unstable marriages. Dropouts are more likely to be involved in problem behaviors, including delinquency, substance abuse, and early childbearing. The chances of becoming an adjudicated criminal and serving time in prison are much higher for dropouts.
- In 1995, high school dropouts were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates were. High school dropouts are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates are.
- Children who are habitually truant are often placed in the custody of social services, a move that is traumatic for children, families and expensive for taxpayers.
- The financial impact of truancy is passed on to taxpayers through the cost of court time and personnel and fees paid to attorneys identified to represent the school in truancy proceedings.
- The school suffers the loss of state and federal funding. For example in 1993, truancy in Los Angeles County was estimated to cost the state of California \$9 million a day.
- Businesses must pay to train uneducated workers. Additionally, businesses and shopping centers in close proximity to schools experience a loss in business due to the number of youth "hanging out".

## Critical Components For Effective Truancy Reduction Programs

- Parent/guardian involvement.
- A continuum of supports, including meaningful incentives and consequences.
- Collaboration with community resources, such as law enforcement, mental health workers, mentoring, and social services.
- Building-level administrative support and commitment from school to maintaining youth in the education mainstream.
- Ongoing evaluation, including meaningful and relevant outcome data geared toward increasing resiliency and reducing risk.

## Factors Contributing To Truancy

### *School Factors:*

- Poor academic performance and a lack of self-esteem tied to poor performance.
- Lack of personal and educational goals due to lack of stimulating school related challenges.
- Teacher variables, such as lack of respect for students and neglect of diverse student needs.
- Schools and/or district's lack of consistency and uniformity to attendance and attendance policy.
- Parents/guardians are not aware or notified of each absence.

## **OVERVIEW OF TRUANCY**

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### *Home and Community Factors:*

- Negative role models, such as peers who are truant or involved in trouble that is more serious.
- Family health or financial concerns that may put pressure on the student to be absent in order to help the family.
- Child is a victim of abuse, neglect and/or other family management issues.
- Pressures from teen pregnancy or parenthood.
- Lack of family support and valuing of education.
- Safety issues, such as violence in or near the home or school.

## 10 THINGS A SCHOOL CAN DO TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE

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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 them about why they were gone—let them 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 keep students in school during school hours.** Create a poster that states "We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 16 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 police officers 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.

## **Keeping Kids in School: Information for Parents**

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As parents you have a very difficult job of trying to not only live your life the best way you know how, but also manage the life of your children. There exists no greater challenge than addressing the many difficulties that will confront your children as they grow. However, one issue in particular has the potential to affect them for many years after they leave your home, their education.

### **WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD STAY IN SCHOOL**

The following is a list of different ways parents can help their children stay in school. This is not a complete list and anything that shows a child that parents are concerned about their education and take an active interest in their educational process, children are less likely to have attendance problems and are more likely to graduate.

- Make education a family priority.
- Build the child's self-confidence as a student by recognizing when he or she does well in school.
- Help the child develop good study and work habits.
- Develop a system of praise and rewards for good study habits, good grades, and other good school-related behaviors.
- Schedule a daily period of home study time.
- Help with homework when needed.
- Meet the child's teachers and other school personnel. They can provide important insights into the child's school performance and suggest ways for improvement.
- Get to know the child's friends and classmates. They can influence the child's school performance. Lack of friends or problems with classmates can also affect school performance.
- Identify and seek treatment for any drug or alcohol issues that may be prevented your child from focusing his/her attention on school.
- Find ways to discuss issues, subjects and course materials being covered at school.
- Help the child develop an interest in extra-curricular school activities such as sports, band, clubs, etc.
- Get the child tutorial help with subjects that pose learning difficulties.
- Help the child develop and achieve academic goals.
- Emphasize the important role education plays throughout life.
- Get involved with the P.T.A., P.T.O., or school board in order to better understand and help change the problems related to school attendance.
- Develop a phone-in policy with the school to check on the child's daily attendance, or have the person in charge of school attendance alert you about non-attendance.
- Explain how dropouts have more trouble getting and keeping jobs and make half as much money then graduates.

From [www.metrokc.gov/proatty/Truancy/Parents.htm](http://www.metrokc.gov/proatty/Truancy/Parents.htm)





# OJJDP

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## Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School

**Myriam L. Baker, Jane Nady Sigmon, and M. Elaine Nugent**

Truancy, or unexcused absence from school, has been linked to serious delinquent activity in youth and to significant negative behavior and characteristics in adults.<sup>1</sup> As a risk factor for delinquent behavior in youth, truancy has been found to be related to substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Garry, 1996; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993).

Much of the work in the area of developmental pathways to delinquency shows that these behavioral problems often are followed by progressively more serious behavioral and adjustment problems in adulthood, including an increased propensity for violent behavior (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Kelley et al., 1997). Further, adults who were frequently truant as teenagers are much more likely than those who were not to have poorer health and mental health, lower paying jobs, an increased chance of living in poverty, more reliance on welfare support, children who exhibit problem behaviors, and an increased likelihood of incarceration (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Hawkins and Catalano, 1995; Ingersoll and LeBoeuf, 1997; Rohrman, 1993).

Left unaddressed, truancy during the preteen and teenage years can have significant negative effects on the student, schools, and society. It is important to identify promising strategies to intervene with chronic truants, address the root causes of truancy, and stop youth's progression from truancy into more serious and violent behaviors.

This Bulletin highlights some of the major research findings regarding the problem of truancy and demonstrates why it is important that schools and communities work to prevent and reduce its incidence. It also discusses Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (TRDP) and the TRDP evaluation.

### Overview of the Truancy Problem

Every day, hundreds of thousands of youth are absent from school; many are absent without an excuse and deemed truant. Although national data on truancy rates are not available (in part because no uniform definition of truancy exists), many large cities report staggering rates of truancy and chronic absenteeism.<sup>2</sup> Some large cities report that unexcused absences can number in the thousands

### A Message From OJJDP

Each school day, hundreds of thousands of students are missing from their classrooms—many without a bona fide excuse.

Left unchecked, truancy is a risk factor for serious juvenile delinquency. Truancy's impact also extends into the adult years where it has been linked to numerous negative outcomes. Consequently, it is critical to identify strategies that intervene effectively with youth who are chronically truant and that interrupt their progress to delinquency and other negative behaviors by addressing the underlying reasons behind their absence from school.

This Bulletin provides an overview of the problem of truancy; describes the correlations of family, school, economic, and student factors with truancy; notes truancy's role as a predictor of delinquency, including juvenile daytime crime; and tallies truancy's social and financial impacts.

Two OJJDP-funded projects are featured: the ACT Now program operated by the Pima County Attorney's Office in Arizona and the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program, a partnership with the Executive Office for Weed and Seed and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program.

Truancy is an early warning sign for future problems and should not be ignored. This Bulletin should assist our efforts to give it the attention it requires.

on certain days (Heavside et al., 1998). In Detroit, MI, for example, school attendance officials investigated 66,440 complaints of chronic absenteeism during the 1994-95 school year, and in Chicago, IL, the average 10th grader missed 6 weeks of instructional time during the 1995-96 school year (Garry, 1996; Roderick et al., 1997). A national review of discipline issues in schools conducted in 1996-97 found that public school principals identified student absenteeism, class cutting, and tardiness as the top discipline problems in their schools (Heavside et al., 1998).

In general, the proportion of truancy cases handled in juvenile court is relatively small. However, the juvenile justice system is increasingly serving as the final stop for truants and as a mechanism for intervening with chronic truants. Recent statistics available on the extent of truancy cases in juvenile court clearly demonstrate how important it is for schools and communities to confront this issue. In 1998, truancy accounted for 26 percent of all formally handled status offense cases, representing an 85-percent increase in truancy cases in juvenile court since 1989 (from 22,200 cases in 1989 to 41,000 cases in 1998) (Puzzanchera et al., forthcoming).

A closer look reveals that the number of petitioned truancy cases around the country is about evenly divided between boys and girls and that whereas the majority of petitioned truancy cases involve 15-year-olds, there have been petitioned cases involving boys and girls as young as 10 (Puzzanchera et al., forthcoming).



## Correlates of Truancy

Preliminary findings from OJJDP's evaluation of TRDP (see page 9) confirm previous findings that, in general, the correlates of truancy fall into four broad categories:

- ◆ **Family factors.** These include lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic violence, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse in the home, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and differing attitudes toward education.
- ◆ **School factors.** These include school climate issues—such as school size and attitudes of teachers, other students, and administrators—and inflexibility in meeting the diverse cultural and learning styles of the students. Schools often have inconsistent procedures in place for dealing with chronic absenteeism and may not have meaningful consequences available for truant youth (e.g., out-of-school suspension).
- ◆ **Economic influences.** These include employed students, single-parent homes, high mobility rates, parents who hold multiple jobs, and a lack of affordable transportation and childcare.
- ◆ **Student variables.** These include drug and alcohol abuse, lack of understanding of attendance laws, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties, and poor physical health.

Although not mentioned specifically, the community significantly influences the occurrence of truancy as well. Community factors are folded into the above four areas. For example, economic conditions and differing culturally based attitudes

toward education are also important factors in the community.

## Predictor of Delinquency

Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure. Several studies have established lack of commitment to school as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school (Bell, Rosen, and Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993). Decades of research have also identified a link between truancy and later problems such as violence, marital problems, job problems, adult criminality, and incarceration (Dryfoos, 1990; Catalano et al., 1998; Robins and Ratcliff, 1978; Snyder and Sickmund, 1995).

More recent studies, such as OJJDP's Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency,<sup>3</sup> indicate that truancy may be a precursor to serious violent and nonviolent offenses and that the connection between truancy and delinquency appears to be particularly acute among males (Kelley et al., 1997). In addition, findings from OJJDP's Study Group on Very Young Offenders indicate that chronic truancy in elementary school is linked to serious delinquent behavior at age 12 and under (Loeber and Farrington, 2000).

## Juvenile Daytime Crime

In several jurisdictions, law enforcement officials have linked high rates of truancy to daytime burglary and vandalism (Baker, 2000). Before TRDP started, for example, police in Tacoma, WA (one of OJJDP's TRDP sites), reported that one-third of burglaries and one-fifth of aggravated assaults occurring between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. on weekdays were committed by juveniles. In Contra Costa County, CA (another TRDP site), police reported that 60 percent of juvenile crime occurred between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. on weekdays. These daytime juvenile crime rates were a primary reason that sites began implementing TRDP.

## Social and Financial Impact

Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and because truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school, they have high dropout rates as well (Dynarski

and Gleason, 1999). The consequences of dropping out of school are well documented. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than youth who stay in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). According to a recent report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001:2), "6.0 percent of workers with a high school diploma were in poverty [in 1999], considerably lower than the proportion of those who had not completed high school (14.3 percent)." High school dropouts are also more likely to depend on welfare, experience unstable marriages, and serve time in prison than those who complete their schooling (Snyder and Sickmund, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

The financial impact of truancy and the dropouts that result can be measured in a number of ways:

- ◆ 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.

Truancy, however, has an even more direct financial impact on communities: the loss of Federal and State education funding.

## OJJDP's Response to Truancy

OJJDP is committed to identifying what works in preventing and reducing truancy and has supported numerous truancy initiatives and evaluations, two of which are described in the sections that follow: ACT Now—a prosecutor-led program in Pima County, AZ—and TRDP.

## The ACT Now Program

The Pima County Attorney's Office (PCAO) in Arizona is among the many prosecutors' offices nationwide that have recognized truancy as a significant problem and designed alternatives to adjudication by intervening with truants to prevent subsequent delinquent and criminal behavior.

Pima County, located in the southeastern portion of Arizona, is the second most populous county in the State, with an estimated population of more than 780,000 people. More than half of the population

lives in Tucson, the county seat. Between 1991 and 1995, Pima County's truancy rates were among the highest in the State, accounting for more than 50 percent of the State's chronic truantries (Bernat, 1996). In addition to high truancy rates, Pima County's juvenile arrest rates were higher than the State average (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 1996). Statistics also showed that in 1993, 8,720 juveniles were referred to the Juvenile Court Center, and between 1993 and 1996, the number of referrals increased approximately 23 percent, to 10,773. Since 1993, the most frequent type of referral (accounting for roughly one-quarter of all referrals) has been for status offenses, which include truancy.<sup>4</sup>

During 1993 and 1994, a statewide working group in Arizona focused attention on youth crime and developed recommendations for prevention and early intervention. To address truancy and youth crime, the group recommended approaches that focus on the root causes of poor school attendance, such as lack of parental control due to insufficient parenting skills, child abuse or neglect in the home, and family instability. The group also suggested that requiring parents to ensure that their children are supervised and holding parents accountable would increase school attendance and decrease juvenile crime. The working group's recommendations resulted in an amendment to the State compulsory school attendance law to include criminal sanctions for parents or guardians who do not ensure that their children attend school.

To address key risk factors associated with youth crime—poor school attendance and truancy—one of the working group members, PCAO's deputy county attorney, initiated the development of a PCAO truancy diversion program. Armed with the new law that strengthened the enforcement of the existing compulsory school attendance statute by creating criminal fines and penalties for parents, PCAO formulated its truancy plan to include three key elements:

- ◆ Enforcement of the mandatory attendance law by holding parents accountable.
- ◆ Provision of a diversion program that offers services to address the root causes of truancy.
- ◆ Sanctions for parents and youth for continued truancy or failure to complete the diversion program successfully.

Critical to the truancy program's success would be the active participation of school districts, local schools, law enforcement offices, and community agencies, all of which have some responsibility for educating, providing services to, assisting, or intervening with youth.

Armed with a vision, a concrete plan, and printed materials, PCAO invited more than 100 key stakeholders to convene and discuss the problem of truancy. The traditional response to truancy in the county had been to process the youth through the juvenile court, which often resulted in diversion with no consequences. As a result, school administrators had lacked confidence in the process and welcomed the new law and the new strategy for addressing truancy. With the interest and support of school administrators, PCAO moved forward with its program for the 1994–95 school year. The program, Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now, became a cooperative effort among PCAO, the schools, law enforcement, and community organizations/agencies that provide services to youth and families.

During the initial stages, no community agency was available to partner with PCAO to provide case management or services to truant youth and their families. Thus, in the first program year, PCAO received referrals directly from schools and coordinated the diversion program. A community-based nonprofit agency, the Center for Juvenile Alternatives (CJA), was established in spring 1995 in Pima County to provide an alternative to the institutional detention of status offenders, to take on case management responsibilities for the ACT Now program, and to provide services as part of the program to youth and their families. During the latter half of 1995, CJA became firmly established, and ACT Now became a fully coordinated interagency response to truancy.<sup>5</sup>

As envisioned, ACT Now was to create and implement a sound, uniform enforcement plan that would not require significant investment of resources. The expressed purpose of the program was to return the habitually truant minor to school through the coordination and cooperation of participating schools, prosecution, law enforcement, and CJA. ACT Now is grounded in the philosophy that a breakdown in parental supervision has occurred, resulting in truancy, curfew violations, and juvenile involvement in a wide range of criminal and other unacceptable behaviors. The program design consists of several steps:

- ◆ Participating schools monitor attendance closely and, after the first unexcused absence, send a letter to parents advising them of the potential for prosecution.<sup>6</sup> The letter states that the school is working in close cooperation with PCAO's Truancy Enforcement Program and that if the youth has at least three unexcused absences, his or her attendance record will be forwarded to the program.
- ◆ After the third unexcused absence, a truancy referral form with identifying data and other background information, the youth's official attendance record, and a notarized affidavit certifying the unexcused absences are sent to CJA.<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ Upon referral, parents are notified that they may be subject to misdemeanor prosecution and their child to filing of a truancy petition in juvenile court. Parents are offered the opportunity to participate in a diversion program and are asked to contact CJA.
- ◆ Upon contacting CJA, parents or guardians are offered a deferred prosecution diversion program and asked to sign a written contract outlining terms of the agreement.
- ◆ The parents who accept deferred prosecution are referred to community agencies that provide access to counseling, parenting skills classes, and support groups for the youth and parents. Referrals are made based on CJA's psychosocial evaluations of truant students and their families to determine the root causes of the truancy.
- ◆ Successful adherence to the terms of the deferred prosecution contract by parents results in case dismissal.<sup>8</sup>

### Process and Implementation Outcomes

In 1996, OJJDP awarded a grant to the American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI) to conduct an evaluation of ACT Now. Full evaluation results, documenting both the implementation process and program outcomes, are found in *Abolish Chronic Truancy Now Diversion Program: Evaluation Report* (Sigmon, Nugent, and Engelhardt-Greer, 1999).<sup>9</sup>

APRI's process evaluation documented the planning, implementation, evolution, and operation of ACT Now from the time the program was initiated through the 1997-98 school year. Evaluation results indicate that, while the program's

### American Prosecutors Research Institute

The American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI) is a nonprofit research and program development resource that provides prosecutors with training and curriculum development, technical assistance, and consultation services and also produces publications and conducts research. Since its inception in 1984, APRI has become a vital resource and national clearinghouse for information on the prosecutorial function and has supplied the field with interdisciplinary responses to the complex problems of crime and delinquency. For more information, visit APRI's Web site at [www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/Index.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/Index.html).

purpose—to prevent chronic truancy by holding parents accountable and offering deferred prosecution along with services—has held constant since its inception, the program's operation evolved significantly in its first 2 years, resulting in improved practice and expanded reach. The following components of the ACT Now program appear to have contributed to its successful implementation:

- ◆ Clearly stated goals and objectives that address a problem of concern to community stakeholders and provide a basis for a program in which communities can participate.
- ◆ Consistent written guidelines on program procedures, including sample letters to parents (in both English and Spanish) and referral forms.
- ◆ Annual training for key school administrators who can discuss program goals and procedures; provision of CJA and PCAO contacts who can answer school administrators' questions about referrals throughout the year.
- ◆ Clear delegation of the development of an attendance policy and the determination of when a student is truant to school officials.
- ◆ Establishment of a minimum number of absences before a student is referred to CJA, while recognizing local school decisionmaking in determining when a referral is appropriate.
- ◆ Use of a new source of leverage in responding to truancy (the threat of parental prosecution) and a consistent response when schools refer parents of truant students to CJA after a minimum of three unexcused absences.
- ◆ A coordinated response that includes services to address the underlying causes of truancy.
- ◆ Allocation of CJA and PCAO staff, who work cooperatively with schools and law enforcement agencies in coordinating a communitywide response to truancy.
- ◆ Enforcement of attendance statutes to send a consistent message to parents and youth regarding the seriousness of truancy.
- ◆ Effective use of media coverage of the program and its associated truancy



sweeps to increase the community's awareness of truancy, its consequences, and efforts to combat it.

Two key shortcomings of the program were identified. First, at the time of the evaluation, the program had not implemented a consistent method for providing timely feedback to schools about the status of their referrals to CJA and the intervention's outcome or whether a case was being prosecuted. Second, the computerized database and case tracking system originally envisioned by PCAO did not materialize, and the collection of data to track cases and monitor program outcomes and effectiveness was not fully implemented until fall 1997. Although the program has taken steps to address both issues, evaluators recommended continued improvement in these two areas. Conscientious followthrough with all program participants is required for the program to be effective in the future.

The successful cooperation and collaboration among agencies involved in the program have contributed significantly to the program's success and represent an unintended consequence of its implementation. As a result of these activities, community stakeholders have developed new links that will serve as the basis for future joint activities of benefit to the community.

### **Evidence of Effectiveness**

APRI focused on answering several key questions about the program's effectiveness by collecting data on attendance rates (year-end attendance), number of trancies and dropouts, referrals to CJA and PCAO, services provided to youth and their families, and successful program completion/case disposition. A sample of four participating school districts was selected for a more indepth analysis of service delivery outcomes in the 1997-98 school year and attendance/truancy patterns over time. The key questions (and findings) of this evaluation follow.

**What impact has ACT Now had on school response to truancy and reporting practices?** The number of truancy referrals has increased steadily (from 46 in the 1994-95 school year to 332 in the 1997-98 school year) as has the number of schools making referrals to ACT Now. Data indicate that since the program's pilot phase in 1995-96, program awareness has increased and truancy reporting has improved. In the years prior to full program implementation (1994-95 and

1995-96), there were few truancy referrals. During this time, schools made referrals directly to PCAO, and the policy of systematic dissemination of information to referring schools was not yet in place. When ACT Now became fully operational and reporting procedures were formalized, the number of schools reporting trancies (and the ratio of schools that reported to those that participated) increased substantially. This increase is a strong indication of school administrators' confidence in the program and reflects significant change in reporting processes.

**How does the threat of prosecution affect whether parents ensure that their children attend school?** Evaluators looked at two measures to determine the answer to this question: (1) the number of advisory letters sent to parents compared with the number of subsequent referrals to CJA; and (2) PCAO prosecution of parents. APRI hypothesized that if the process has an effect on parental accountability, the number of referrals should be less than the number of advisory letters sent to parents, indicating that action had been taken to address the truancy. Participating schools countywide sent a total of 2,870 advisory letters to parents or guardians of truant youth between 1995 and 1998. During the same period, schools made 1,118 referrals to CJA based on the parents' or guardians' failure to address truancy, a number substantially less than the number of advisory letters sent. Thus, the threat of prosecution prompted 61 percent of parents or guardians to take corrective action. When the effect on parental response is examined by school year, however, a marked decrease is seen between the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years—in 1995-96, 86 percent of parents took corrective action, as compared with only 21 percent in 1996-97. This variation over time can be attributed to a number of changes that were occurring in the program.

The decrease in the number of advisory letters sent by schools and in subsequent program referrals between the 1995-96 and the 1996-97 school years can be linked to the fact that ACT Now had not yet been formalized in 1995-96. Also, the 1995-96 school year was the first year that schools referred trancies directly to CJA rather than PCAO. CJA offered very little outreach to the schools during this time to explain their role or to build confidence among school administrators in the procedures. Both factors may account for the decrease in parental response in the 1996-97 school

year. After the program procedures were more clearly articulated to school administrators, the number of advisory letters sent and parental response to the letters increased.

Truants whose parents failed to address the attendance problem or participate in the ACT Now program were referred by CJA to PCAO for prosecution. Between 1994 and 1998, PCAO handled 674 truancy cases. The number of such defendants increased over time, from 50 in 1994-95 to 372 in 1997-98. Between the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, the number of defendants increased 171 percent (from 68 to 184); similarly, a 102-percent increase in the number of defendants occurred between the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years (from 184 to 372). Overall, nearly 65 percent of the cases represented truants between ages 13 and 15, and 22 percent involved truants between ages 10 and 12. The youngest truants, ages 6 to 9, represented approximately 11 percent of the cases.

Using prosecutorial discretion, PCAO did not file charges in all 674 cases. An analysis of PCAO truancy case processing by school year shows that the majority of cases were closed with no disposition, primarily because a parent or guardian could not be located. More than half of the cases were closed in school years 1994-95 and 1995-96. By the 1996-97 school year, the number of cases closed without PCAO action decreased, and more parents were prosecuted, specifically:

- ◆ In school year 1994-95, 27 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- ◆ In school year 1995-96, 23 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- ◆ In school year 1996-97, 41 percent of cases were prosecuted.
- ◆ In school year 1997-98, 41 percent of cases were prosecuted.

Of those cases that were not closed by PCAO, the majority resulted in guilty pleas, and of those that were resolved through a bench trial, 98 percent were found guilty. The most commonly imposed sanctions included community service or a \$200 fine. In ACT Now's initial phase (during the 1994 to 1996 school years), almost half of those prosecuted (42.9 percent) were sentenced to perform community service and slightly more than one-third (35.7 percent) were fined.

By the 1996-97 school year, the range of sanctions had expanded to include higher

finer—between \$300 and \$500—suggesting a stronger attempt by the juvenile court and PCAO to hold parents accountable. In fact, during this period the number of parents/guardians who took corrective action to address the truancy before being referred for prosecution increased substantially. Fewer community service sanctions and more sentences of unsupervised probation and payment of fines were imposed. One explanation for the change in types of sanctions imposed is that the community service option did not work as originally planned. Under the initial program plans, schools were to develop community service projects at the school for parents to complete as part of their sentence. Schools were reluctant and, as a result, few developed such projects. Anecdotal information gathered during site visits and through telephone interviews indicates that because the community service concept did not work as planned, it was phased out as a sentencing option.

**Are truant youth and their parents or guardians receiving adequate services to address the root causes of the truancy?** CJA conducts an intake assessment before making any service referrals. Services are tailored to the specific needs of truant youth and their families to address the root causes of truancy in addition to other factors related to family social and physical health. Services range from assessments to evaluations to counseling to living assistance. In the 1995–96 school year, CJA staff made only 197 service referrals, but by the following school year, the number of referrals had increased to 593.<sup>10</sup> The majority of referrals were for counseling, intensive case management services, and participation in the ACT Well class, a 6-hour program designed to provide information to youth and parents and help them build skills to prevent truancy. The increase in referrals continued in the 1997–98 school year; the majority of the 714 referrals made were for intake assessment followed by other services, such as counseling, case management, and conflict resolution.

To further assess service delivery, additional individual-level data were collected for the four school districts in the evaluation sample. In the 1997–98 school year, the first year individual-level data were available, 394 youth from the four school districts included in the evaluation were referred to CJA. CJA recommended services for more than half of all the youth

referred. Services were recommended only for those youth whose parents responded either to the first or second CJA advisory letter (57 percent).

Of the parents who did not respond to the letters, more than one-third were referred for parental prosecution. For others of these parents (roughly 10 percent), the case was closed and no recommendations were made because the parents or youth could not be located or had moved, the youth was in an out-of-home placement, the youth was being home schooled, or the school withdrew the referral. Of the youth who were referred to services, 79 percent successfully completed the program and the charges were dismissed. As shown in the table below, parental response to the first letter from CJA is a strong predictor of successful program completion.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the provision of services has a lasting effect on subsequent truancy and parental supervision. In the 1997–98 school year, only 33 of the 394 youth (8 percent) referred from the four school districts in the sample were recidivists, suggesting that ACT Now and related services have an effect on truancy.<sup>11</sup> Ideally, tracking youth individual-level data to assess prior performance in the program would provide a further indication of the strength of the relationship between successful program completion and recidivism. However, the data available for this evaluation were insufficient for such indepth analysis.

**How has the number of truanancies and dropouts changed during the program?** Two variables were used to assess changes in truancy and dropout rates: school reports of the number of truanancies and the cumulative number of dropouts. Data were collected from PCAO and the four sample school districts for the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years to determine

whether the number of truanancies had changed.<sup>12</sup>

Each school district showed a decrease in the number of truanancies between the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years, ranging from a decrease of 64 percent in the largest school district to 4 percent in the smallest. The truancy rate for the largest district in the sample originally had been among the highest in the State, and thus the observed decrease is dramatic.

Another measure of the program's effectiveness was the examination of recidivism. Because truancy data on individuals were unavailable, APRI used the number of dropouts as a proxy variable for subsequent, chronic truant behavior (i.e., recidivism). If ACT Now is effective in addressing chronic truancy, there should be a decrease in the number of dropouts relative to the number of truanancies being reported. Such a finding would provide initial support for the hypothesis that ACT Now is effective in breaking the cycle of truancy before it leads to dropping out of school. With the exception of the two smaller school districts, both of which experienced a slight increase in the number of dropouts, the cumulative number of truanancies and dropouts decreased from the 1996–97 to the 1997–98 school year. In addition, the largest decrease in dropouts correlated with the largest decrease in truancy rates.

Although these figures suggest that ACT Now is effective in reducing chronic truancy and school dropouts, no further concrete conclusions can be drawn from these data because the number of truanancies reported does not equal the number of youth who have been truant. Truancy data on individuals are necessary to determine whether the proportion of dropouts to truanancies has changed over time. Moreover, without individual truancy and dropout data, it is impossible to make

**Relationship Between Parents' Response to Letters and Completion of Program (1997–98 School Year)**

Response to Letter	Program Successfully Completed		Program Not Completed		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
First	119	86.2	19	13.8	138	100
Second	34	73.9	12	26.1	46	100
Total	153	83.2	31	16.8	184	100

Note: Chi-square=3.737; p=0.05.

concrete statements about the relationship between truancy and dropping out of school.

### Overall Assessment

ACT Now has developed into an institutionalized response to truancy in Pima County. The schools, law enforcement, PCAO, service providers, and the local media see the program as an integral part of the community's efforts to address truancy and associated problems that put youth at high risk of serious delinquent behavior.

Overall, ACT Now has become a new source of leverage for schools to respond to truancy and has allowed for a more consistent response when schools make referrals to CJA. Critical to this process was the establishment of a minimum number of absences before a referral was made and a recognition of local schools' decision-making authority in determining when a referral is appropriate. In addition, the relationships built among the schools, law enforcement, the juvenile court, and PCAO are an important program outcome.

The outcome evaluation supports APRI's finding that ACT Now has resulted in a coordinated response to truancy that is embraced by the schools, law enforcement, the prosecutor, and the courts. This response is evidenced by the number of truancy sweeps, CJA referrals, services provided to youth and their parents, parental prosecutions, guilty pleas, and the increasing monetary sanctions imposed. ACT Now also appears to have an effect on parental accountability and school attendance.

This evidence, however, must be interpreted carefully, as it is based primarily on aggregate data. Individual data on truants, parents, and recidivism would provide stronger evidence. In addition, information from parents regarding their perceptions of the ACT Now program and its impact on their supervision of school attendance would further enhance the current evaluation's findings.

### Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program

In 1998, OJJDP, the Executive Office for Weed and Seed, and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program initiated a demonstration grant program for truancy reduction.<sup>13</sup> In

developing the structure of their truancy reduction effort, OJJDP and its partnering agencies relied on lessons learned from and key principles of other truancy and risk prevention initiatives that have shown promising results.

A comprehensive, collaborative model that targets the reduction of risk factors associated with incidence of truancy was suggested by the Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) Initiative<sup>14</sup> and is further supported in the literature (Catalano et al., 1998; Dryfoos, 1990; Morley and Rossman, 1997; Schorr, 1997). The models that show the most promise, not only of reducing truancy, but also of affecting its risk factors, include several key components:

- ◆ Parental involvement.
- ◆ Meaningful sanctions or consequences for truancy.
- ◆ Meaningful incentives for school attendance.
- ◆ Ongoing school-based truancy reduction programs.
- ◆ Involvement of community resources (e.g., law enforcement).

Based on her extensive work with successful prevention models targeting at-risk youth and families across the country, Schorr (1997) concludes such programs must:

- ◆ Be comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering.
- ◆ View children in the context of their families.
- ◆ Deal with families as parts of neighborhoods and communities.
- ◆ Have a long-term, preventive orientation and a clear mission and continue to evolve over time.
- ◆ Be well managed by competent and committed individuals with clearly identifiable skills.
- ◆ Have staff who are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services.
- ◆ Operate in settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

One of the most important elements of any effective prevention effort is the existence of a collaborative partnership of public agencies, community organizations, and concerned individuals that interact

with and provide services to truant youth and their families. OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders highlights the critical need for this collaboration: "Comprehensive, communitywide prevention requires collaboration and resource sharing. In most communities, barriers must be broken down and collaborative bridges built among and within agencies, organizations, and groups with responsibility for addressing juvenile delinquency" (Howell, 1995:26). For example, schools need to interact more effectively with community organizations (businesses, senior organizations, local government, social services organizations, health agencies, and civic organizations) to achieve their educational goals. Such collaboration needs to exist within the school system as well—among teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, special education teachers, parents, and students (Howell, 1995).

### TRDP Demonstration Sites

In 1998, OJJDP solicited applications from communities that were engaged in integrated, communitywide plans to reduce truancy. Applicants were required to outline a comprehensive program that included four major components:

- ◆ A continuum of services to support truant youth and their families.
- ◆ System reform and accountability.
- ◆ Data collection (from schools, agencies, courts) and evaluation.
- ◆ A community education and awareness program that addresses the need to prevent truancy and intervene with truant youth.

In 1999, OJJDP awarded funds to eight sites, a mixture of Weed and Seed and non-Weed and Seed sites (one, Georgia, declined to apply for continuation after the first year). The seven remaining sites are diverse in geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and community-based leadership. Common to the truant population at all sites is the high representation of minority students and families and of students and families living in poverty.

Sites received either \$50,000 or \$100,000 per year for 3 years. The disparity in funding was due to the assumption that the Weed and Seed sites (funded at \$50,000) would need less money for start-up and planning because the program would exist within the local Weed and Seed effort. While the demonstration

## Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) is a private, non-profit organization that promotes the health, education, and well-being of children and families through research, program development, and evaluation of promising community-based activities. CFFC accomplishes this by assisting in the formation of partnerships between governmental and private entities to support the community implementation of effective practices. In addition to evaluating TRDP, CFFC oversees the evaluation of several truancy projects in Colorado. For more information, visit CFFC's Web site at [www.coloradofoundation.org](http://www.coloradofoundation.org). For information about CFFC's evaluation of TRDP, visit [www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject](http://www.coloradofoundation.org/nationaltruancyproject).

sites/programs listed below were being chosen, OJJDP selected the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) as the national evaluator of this project.

**Department of Health and Human Services/Weed and Seed Office, Contra Costa County, CA.** Contra Costa County is building on its Weed and Seed efforts to implement a program targeting ninth grade students with a history of chronic truancy and their families. An onsite probation officer will deliver the intervention by assessing families and youth and referring them to appropriate resources within the school and community.

**State Attorney's Office, Jacksonville, FL.** The State Attorney's Office provides a precourt diversion program for truant youth and their families. The school district refers families to the program when chronic truancy has not been solved by school-based intervention. Following the referral, a hearing is conducted with the parent, youth, school attendance social worker, and volunteer hearing officer. A contract is negotiated that includes plans for reducing truancy and accessing services and community supports. A case manager makes home visits and monitors the family's compliance with the plan. In the fall of 2000, a school-based component

was added to address prevention and early intervention at two elementary schools, where an onsite case manager monitors attendance and provides early outreach.

**Clarke County School District (Weed and Seed site), Athens, GA.** Clarke County's Reducing Truancy in Middle Grades program employed a case manager who worked directly with students at two middle schools to identify youth with five or more unexcused absences. The case manager made home visits, called parents, and facilitated parent-teacher conferences to assess the causes of truancy. The case manager provided referrals to community-based resources and some direct services to families. In addition, students and families who did not respond to the program's case management approach were summoned to appear before an attendance panel. This site declined to apply for continuation after the first year and is no longer participating in TRDP.

**University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI.** The University of Hawaii is building on a previous program to prevent truancy in the Wai'anae area. Attendance officers in two elementary schools work to provide early outreach to young students and their families when absences become chronic. Community resources are used to address the issues that may prevent youth from attending school regularly. In addition, the schools work with the Honolulu police department to provide Saturday truancy workshops for youth with chronic truancy problems and their families.

**Suffolk County Probation Department (Weed and Seed site), Yaphank, NY.** Suffolk County's South Country Truancy Reduction Program, which builds on community policing efforts, targets elementary and middle school students who have illegal absences. A probation officer monitors attendance in collaboration with school personnel, facilitates access to school and community-based services needed by the student and family to establish regular school attendance, and observes attendance and other school-based indicators to ensure that the student's attendance and engagement at school are improving. A similar model is in existence at the local high school.

**Mayor's Anti-Gang Office (Weed and Seed site), Houston, TX.** The Mayor's Anti-Gang Office placed an experienced case manager in one high school to identify students with chronic truancy patterns. Through home visits and school-based supports, students and their families are provided with services, support, and resources to address truancy. The program also works with community police officers, who provide a "knock and talk" service for youth and their families when truancy continues to be an issue. The officers assess family functioning and deliver information about the law and truancy outcomes; they also issue the official summons to court for a truancy petition.

**King County Superior Court, Seattle, WA.** After 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 includes education about truancy law and outcomes and facilitates planning between the parent and youth for addressing the cause of truancy. Community truancy boards composed of local community members hear the case, develop a plan for use with the youth and family, and monitor compliance with the stipulated agreement. In the fall of 2000, a school-based component was added to address prevention and early intervention.

**Safe Streets Campaign (Weed and Seed site), Tacoma, WA.** The Tacoma truancy project is based in one middle school where an onsite coordinator monitors attendance and connects youth and their families with community resources to address the underlying causes of truancy. This program works in tandem with law enforcement officials and a truancy center, to which truant youth are delivered and then assessed after pickup by community police officers.

### The National Evaluation

The goal of the evaluation of TRDP is to describe the process by which inter-agency community-based coalitions develop, implement, and sustain effective truancy reduction efforts. Sites work with the national evaluator to accomplish the goals of the evaluation. By design, these efforts are intended to build on the community's strengths: its service organizations, social support agencies, businesses, parents, youth, and religious organizations. In addition, programs should enhance the awareness of the community, policymakers, and stakeholders that truancy prevention and reduction are necessary components of systemic support to keep youth in school and out of the juvenile justice system.

The evaluation has two main components: determining whether the programs reduce truancy and describing the role and processes of the community-based collaboratives driving the local programs. The collaboratives' processes also are being evaluated to help other sites in their implementation plans.

The design for program evaluation is multimodal. As sites implement their programs and begin to serve students and families, numeric and descriptive data are

collected. Indicators for success evaluated across all sites include school attendance, school discipline, and academic achievement. Each site has been empowered to further tailor its individual evaluation to track additional outcomes that may be of local interest. For example, some sites are questioning participating students and families about their awareness of existing public outreach efforts to determine the efforts' efficacy in reaching the target audience.

A survey was administered early in program implementation to assess the type of information and level of detail that would be available from individual sites. This survey directly informed the empirical data collection strategy planned. Individual-level, schoolwide, and communitywide data on the following elements were requested:

- ◆ **Individual-level:** Demographics of the targeted students and their families and targeted students' school attendance, academic achievement, discipline incidents, and so forth.
- ◆ **Schoolwide:** Special education rates, data regarding free and reduced-price lunches, school completion/promotion rates, attendance rates, discipline statistics (e.g., suspension, expulsion, office referrals), academic achievement information, and dropout rates.
- ◆ **Communitywide:** Truancy petitions filed and cases heard (including breakdown by age, ethnicity, gender, and grade level of truant youth), daytime crime data (including arrests, gang activity, and commitments of youth to secure detention facilities), probation and diversion data, comparable data from a control group (i.e., another school), and other data involving issues such as substance abuse, child welfare, and mental health.

All sites may not have all of the data available; however, most key correlates and indicators are available to inform the evaluation.

### Program Context

To date, contextual data describing the schools and communities in which the programs are situated indicate that primary correlates with truancy and school disengagement include poverty, low academic achievement, high mobility (e.g.,

moving from home to home, school to school), high rates of school discipline, and overrepresentation of special education eligibility.

Of the data elements requested, only attendance rates, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches, and special education rates were reported reliably. These data are provided in figure 1. Because school districts and States vary in the way such data are collected and counted, the consistency in measures across sites is not yet clear.

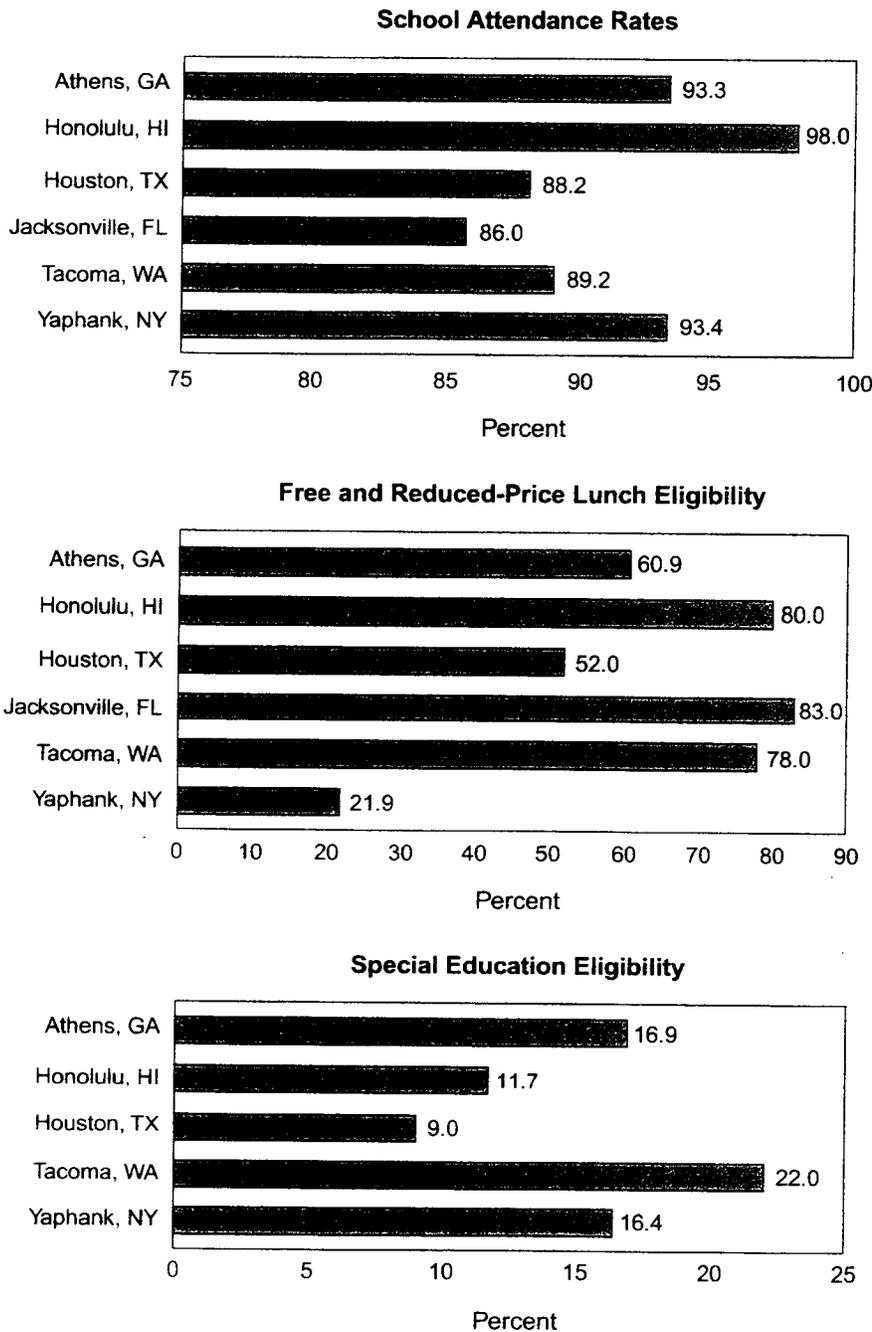
As an early activity in the evaluation, sites were asked to complete a logic model for their programs, identifying the targeted strengths and needs of the students, families, schools, and community. Sites used the model to frame the flow of needs assessment, program strategies, measurable milestones, and ultimate results. "Youth to be in school and succeeding" was unanimously identified as the expected result of the sites' truancy programs. Each site used the same logic model template to frame its assessment and plan. Because each site serves a different community and different target population, the strengths, needs, strategies, and milestones may differ from site to site. Figure 2 summarizes the commonalities found across sites (see page 11).

### The Community-Based Collaboratives

The evaluation of community-based collaborative groups depends on multiple methods to gather information: a survey entitled *Working Together: A Profile of Collaboration* (Omni Institute, 1992), one-on-one telephone interviews, onsite group interviews, and site-based observations. The information collected during the first year is considered a baseline and will help evaluators understand the context in which each program exists.

*Working Together* measures the perceptions of group members in five key areas: context, structure, membership, process, and results. Survey results are intended to be used as a springboard for action planning. Evaluators administer the instrument annually and inform each site of the results on a yearly basis. During the first year that *Working Together* was administered, evaluators received 82 completed surveys (about 11 surveys

**Figure 1: School-Based Context of TRDP**



Note: Data unavailable for Contra Costa County, CA, and Seattle, WA. Special education data unavailable for Jacksonville, FL.

from each of the 7 participating sites). Representatives from law enforcement, courts, schools, mental health agencies, and community-based organizations

completed the surveys. Figure 3 (page 12) shows that, on average, sites rated their performance and success in each area fairly high, with some differences.

Telephone interviews, which will be held annually, were conducted with participants from six sites in the first year.<sup>15</sup> A total of 24 interviews—approximately 4 per site—were completed with representatives from law enforcement, schools, courts, and community-based organizations who were active in the community-based groups. The interviews assessed participants' awareness of the local causes and correlates of truancy, their perceptions of the presence of needed partners in the collaborative task force, the state of inter-agency collaboration, and the need for policy change.

Interviewees all indicated their communities had been working on truancy issues for at least 2 years. As they reported, the causes of truancy, in general, fell into four broad categories: family factors, school factors, economic influences, and student variables (see page 2 for a more detailed discussion of these factors).

Interview respondents were asked to identify who should be the collaborative's key members (see figure 4, page 12). The majority identified law enforcement, youth services, juvenile justice agencies, schools, social services, and community-based organizations as important key members. Although very few mentioned parents, youth, the faith community, businesses, and social organizations, these individuals and organizations are also key members of truancy collaboratives.

Respondents were then asked if all needed partners identified above were at the table. The majority indicated that all necessary stakeholders were present (see figure 5, page 12); some realized they were missing important members of the community—typically identified were the faith and business communities.

Onsite interviews, which will be held annually, suggested that many of the collaboratives were unclear about their group vision or mission and hence about their goals and necessary steps to achieve goals.

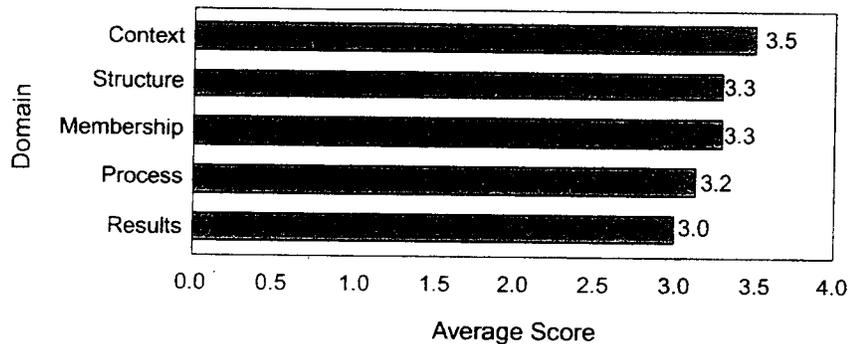
Site-based observations are still being compiled, as some sites were not operational at the time this Bulletin was written. In addition, the operational sites did not always understand the purpose of requests for site visits during which "typical" activities would be observed. Hence, these data are still being collected in some cases.

Specific issues regarding jurisdiction, funding, and the sharing of information

**Figure 2: Logic Model for TRDP Evaluation**

Family	School	Student	Community
<b>Strengths</b>			
Communication between school and home Knowledge of home Knowledge of family needs	Afterschool resources available Information-sharing established with other agencies	Knowledge of school environment Desire to be in school and succeeding	Strong agency collaboration Available resources Community center Tutorial services Community attendance panel Clear laws Political support
<b>Needs</b>			
Basic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul> Education and awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting skills</li> <li>• Value of education</li> <li>• Community resources</li> <li>• Importance of parental involvement at school</li> <li>• Truancy and attendance laws</li> </ul> Addressing cultural differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translation of services</li> <li>• Value of education</li> </ul> Treatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health assessment</li> <li>• Family counseling</li> <li>• Substance abuse intervention</li> </ul>	Positive school climate Education and awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk factors for truancy</li> <li>• Process for truancy referrals</li> <li>• Early intervention/prevention</li> </ul> Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Mediation</li> <li>• Alternative programs</li> <li>• Afterschool programs</li> </ul> Tracking and monitoring attendance Commitment by administration	Education and awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consequences of truancy law</li> <li>• Value of education</li> <li>• Available resources</li> </ul> Social/emotional skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjustment to middle school/high school</li> <li>• Peer and family relationships</li> <li>• Coping strategies</li> </ul> Behavioral support Academic support Attachment to school	Service agency coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamlined assessment and referral</li> <li>• Reduced duplication of services</li> </ul> Culturally appropriate practices Involvement of all community partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Faith community</li> <li>• Business community</li> </ul> Education/awareness/mobilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truancy law</li> <li>• Value of education</li> <li>• Truancy risk factors</li> <li>• Process across agencies</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>			
Assessment Resource referral Counseling Education Parenting programs	Technical assistance and training Grants to support efforts Cross-agency training Development of districtwide attendance policy Development of afterschool programs	Assessment Referral Peer programs Truancy education Education about consequences Social work interventions	Development of mission statement Assessment of collaborative Training conference Public awareness campaign Establishment of a task force Community training
<b>Milestones</b>			
Improved access to services Improved involvement in child's education Improved employment Access to childcare and transportation Understanding of truancy process Improved parenting skills 1,000 families served	Awareness of risk factors More efficient referrals Community truancy boards in place Conference planned Training disseminated to schools Understanding of truancy system Increased program referrals Improved monitoring of attendance More available services	Improved peer and family relationships Decreased behavior referrals Improved attendance Improved academics Improved access to services Improved attachment to school	Mission and work plan identified Contract made with schools Conference held Community awareness enhanced Public service announcements distributed Improved involvement and valuing of youth

**Figure 3: Results of Initial (First Year) Administration of Working Together**

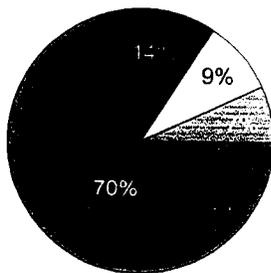


Note:  $n=82$  responses. A score of 1=negative, 4=positive.

about youth and families are problematic for certain agencies and need to be dealt with from the start to enhance implementation of the program and the ongoing health of the coalition. As part of the planning process, collaboratives should identify the roles, responsibilities, and understandings among cooperating agencies and formalize agreements by using a

memorandum of understanding. In addition, the collaboratives require continuing education and need to be made aware of the importance of involving the community at large—particularly parents, youth, the faith community, and local businesses. Parents and youth are required to be involved, and the faith and local business communities are key for volunteer, financial, and in-kind support through services. CFFC (as national evaluator) offers facilitation and action planning services to collaboratives. Such activities can greatly

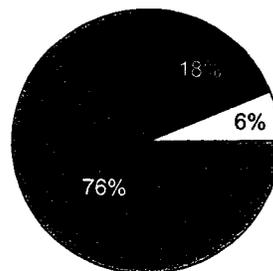
**Figure 4: Partners Identified as Necessary to Reducing Truancy**



-  Law enforcement, youth services, juvenile justice agencies, schools, social services, community-based organizations
-  Truancy center, mental health organizations
-  State attorney, faith-based organizations, hospital, parents
-  Business community, youth, social organizations

Note:  $n=18$  respondents.

**Figure 5: Response to Question Regarding the Presence of Necessary Partners**



-  All present
-  Missing key members
-  Do not know

Note:  $n=17$  respondents.

benefit these and future projects that are seated within a collaborative and multi-agency setting; sites will be encouraged to use this service in the future.

### Overall Assessment

TRDP's first year has yielded a strong base of information to direct the program's further development. Almost all of the participating sites need much more time, support, and training than anticipated to facilitate a successful start, both in program implementation and development and in maintenance of the community-based collaboratives directing the program.

Access to data, particularly across system lines (e.g., schools, courts, law enforcement), continues to require evaluation staff assistance in a variety of ways. To ensure that the data collected are consistent across sites and that they reflect the context in which the program exists, ongoing contact is crucial—especially site-based support on at least a semiannual basis. The national evaluators can facilitate information sharing and formalized agreements that might not otherwise occur so readily.

In addition, implementing culturally appropriate practices and obtaining family involvement continue to be troublesome for the sites. OJJDP has encouraged sites to use resources that can assist in developing strategies for improving practices in these areas.

Early in the project, the evaluation revealed commonalities in structure and planning processes among the seven participating programs, such as the existence of an extensive startup period and a strong community collaborative. After examining initial outcome data, evaluators will make available implications for best practices in the fall of 2001. Evaluators are tracking outcome data that focus on five target areas: student demographics, family demographics, a needs assessment, a service plan, and quarterly outcomes. Specific outcomes being measured include improvement in attendance and academics and reductions in office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and involvement with the juvenile justice department.

It is expected that the lessons learned from the diverse TRDP programs about establishing and maintaining effective community-based leadership and



4. Retrieved from the Web at [www.sc.co.pima.az.us](http://www.sc.co.pima.az.us).

5. Seven school districts (not including the Tucson Unified School District) participate in ACT Now. Of these, the four most populous were selected to participate in the evaluation of ACT Now: Amphitheater, Sunnyside, Marana, and Flowing Wells. All four are located in the Tucson metropolitan area, and their total student enrollment represents approximately 77 percent of the Pima County public school students who are not enrolled in the Tucson Unified School District.

6. Because school attendance is monitored by an attendance clerk at each school, attendance clerks and local school administrators were key figures in program implementation.

7. The affidavit certifying the truant student's attendance record is a critical component of the prosecution strategy because it obviates the necessity of having school officials testify at court proceedings in each case. This plan represented a major inducement to school administrators, who did not relish the notion that staff time could be taken up with frequent court appearances.

8. Prior to the involvement of CJA, participating service providers were asked to submit information to PCAO verifying that referred parents had successfully completed the program and thus complied with the terms of the diversion agreement. Later, CJA monitored compliance with the terms of the diversion contract.

9. To order this publication, contact APRI's Research Unit at 703-549-4253 or visit its Web site, [www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/Research\\_and\\_Development/Research\\_and\\_Development.html](http://www.ndaa-apri.org/apri/Research_and_Development/Research_and_Development.html).

10. The number of referrals to various services does not represent the number of youth referred to such services. Youth often are referred to multiple services; however, referral data were only available in aggregate form, making it impossible to determine the actual number of youth who received services.

11. The 1997-98 school year marks the first year in which recidivism data were tracked.

12. Ideally, the evaluation would consider pretest truancy from the 1995-96 school year; however, reliable truancy data for that year were unavailable.

interventions will guide future work by OJJDP and communities to prevent truancy.

## Conclusion

Chronic truancy has long been identified as a key predictor for negative outcomes in education, employment, and social success. The correlates of chronic truancy continue to be holistic in nature and include family, school, economic, and student variables. Several promising programs are now in existence and, with the support of OJJDP, are making significant headway against the truancy problem.

Programs such as ACT Now and TRDP build on the strengths and resources within local communities to target truancy from a "carrot and stick" perspective. Students and families need both the incentive to attend school (the carrot) and meaningful consequences for chronic nonattendance (the stick). Truancy is a violation of State law as a status offense for the youth and educational neglect for the parent; addressing the underlying issues is necessary for long-term behavior change. Underlying issues that have been identified by these projects include family poverty, less education, substance abuse, cultural variation in the valuing of public education, and pressures on the youth to work and provide childcare for younger siblings.

Implementing a successful, sustainable truancy reduction project has its share of challenges, as illustrated by ACT Now and TRDP. Gaining consensus among schools to adopt a uniform definition of truancy and a standardized approach to

the increase in school absences is a significant challenge. In addition, gaining cooperation from diverse key community players, such as law enforcement, courts, social services, parents, and community-based organizations, can be a challenging and time-consuming task. Finally, implementing effective, data-driven methods for tracking both the occurrence of truancy and the impact of programs on key indicators of success is a struggle for many programs.

## Endnotes

1. The definition of truancy is usually established by school district policy and may vary across districts. For the purposes of this Bulletin, truancy is generally defined as an unexcused absence from school or class (i.e., an absence without the proper approval of appropriate school officials).

2. Generally, absentee rates are highest in public schools in the inner-city where larger numbers of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (Heaviside et al., 1998). (Higher truancy rates generally correlate with poverty; higher rates of free and reduced-price lunches are typically used as evidence of poverty.)

3. This series of long-term studies, which have followed thousands of at-risk youth in three cities for more than a decade, is designed to improve the understanding of serious delinquency, violence, and drug use by examining how youth develop within the context of family, school, peers, and community. For more details about this program, visit [ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ccd](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ccd).

13. Weed and Seed is a community-based strategy combining law enforcement and human services to improve communities by reducing crime and revitalizing community involvement and resources. Weed and Seed requires an active and participating collaborative group, on which the grant program can theoretically build.

14. YOEM, which was a joint initiative of OJJDP and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, focused on truants, dropouts, and youth who were fearful of attending school, suspended or expelled, or in need of help to become reintegrated into mainstream schools from juvenile detention and correctional settings.

15. The exclusion of two sites was due to site-based difficulties with startup and interviewee accessibility.

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# Manual to Combat Truancy

July 1996

*Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education  
in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice*

## The Problem of Truancy in America's Communities

Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up and losing his or her way. When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community at large that they are in trouble and need our help if they are to keep moving forward in life.

Research data tells us that students who become truant and eventually drop out of school put themselves at a long term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens. High school dropouts, for example, are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates. In 1995, high school dropouts were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates. In addition, high school dropouts who are employed earn much lower salaries. Students who become truant and eventually drop out of high school too often set themselves up for a life of struggle.

Truancy is a gateway to crime. High rates of truancy are linked to high daytime burglary rates and high vandalism. According to the Los Angeles County Office of Education, truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior. **"I've never seen a gang member who wasn't a truant first,"** says California District Attorney Kim Menninger. Truancy prevention efforts should be a part of any community policing effort to prevent crime before it happens.

During a recent sample period in Miami more than 71 percent of 13 to 16 year-olds prosecuted for criminal violations had been truant.

In Minneapolis, daytime crime dropped 68 percent after police began citing truant students.

In San Diego, 44 percent of violent juvenile crime occurs between 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

While no national data on the extent of truancy exists, we know that in some cities unexcused absences can number in the thousands each day. In Pittsburgh, for example, each day approximately 3,500 students or 12 percent of the pupil population is absent and about 70 percent of these absences are unexcused. In Philadelphia, approximately 2,500 students a day are absent without an excuse. In Milwaukee, on any given school day, there are approximately 4,000 unexcused absences.

Combating truancy is one of the first ways that a community can reach out quickly to a disaffected young person and help families that may be struggling with a rebellious teenager. This guide seeks to offer parents, school officials, law enforcement agencies and communities a set of principles to design their own strategies to combat truancy and describes successful models of how anti-truancy initiatives are working in communities across the nation.

## **Users' Guide to Deterring Truancy**

Each school and each community need to decide which steps to take to reduce truancy. These decisions should be made with the active involvement of parents, educators, law enforcement personnel, juvenile and family court judges, and representatives from social service, community, and religious organizations.

The communities that have had the most success in deterring truancy not only have focused on improving procedures -- such as those that accurately track student attendance -- but each also has implemented a comprehensive strategy that focuses on incentives and sanctions for truants and their parents. Below are five primary elements of a comprehensive community and educational strategy to combat truancy.

### ***1. Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities***

Parents play the fundamental role in the education of their children. This applies to every family regardless of the parents' station in life, their income, or their educational background. Nobody else commands greater influence in getting a young person to go to school every day and recognizing how a good education can define his or her future.

For families and schools to work together to solve problems like truancy, there must be mutual trust and communication. Many truancy programs contain components which provide intensive monitoring, counseling and other family-strengthening services to truants and their families. Schools can help by being "family-friendly" and encouraging teachers and parents to make regular contact before problems arise. Schools may want to consider arranging convenient times and neutral settings for parent meetings, starting homework hotlines, training teachers to work with parents, hiring or appointing a parent liaison, and giving parents a voice in school decisions.

### ***2. Ensure that students face firm sanctions for truancy***

School districts should communicate to their students that they have zero tolerance for truancy. State legislatures have found that linking truancy to such items as a student's grades or driver's license can help reduce the problem. Delaware, Connecticut, and several other states have daytime curfews during school hours that allow law enforcement officers to question youth to determine if their absence is legitimate. In a few states, including New York, a student with a certain number of unexcused absences can be failed in his or her courses. A Wisconsin judge may, among other options, order a truant to attend counseling or to attend an education program designed for him or her.

### ***3. Create meaningful incentives for parental responsibility***

It is critical that parents of truant children assume responsibility for truant behavior. It is up to each community to determine the best way to create meaningful incentives for such parents to ensure that their children go to school. In some states, parents of truant children are asked to participate in parenting education programs. Some other states, such as Maryland and Oklahoma, have determined that parents who fail to prevent truancy can be subject to formal sanction or lose eligibility for certain public assistance. Communities can also provide positive incentives for responsible parents who ensure their child's regular school attendance. Such incentives can include increased eligibility to participate in publicly funded programs. Local officials, educators and parents, working together, can make a shared commitment to assume responsibility for reducing truancy -- and can choose the incentives that make the most sense for their community.

#### ***4. Establish ongoing truancy prevention programs in school***

Truancy can be caused by or related to such factors as student drug use, violence at or near school, association with truant friends, lack of family support for regular attendance, emotional or mental health problems, lack of a clear path to more education or work, or inability to keep pace with academic requirements. Schools should address the unique needs of each child and consider developing initiatives to combat the root causes of truancy, including tutoring programs, added security measures, drug prevention initiatives, mentorship efforts through community and religious groups, campaigns for involving parents in their children's school attendance, and referrals to social service agencies.

Schools should also find new ways to engage their students in learning, including such hands-on options as career academies, school-to-work opportunities, and community service. They should enlist the support of local business and community leaders to determine the best way to prevent and reduce truancy. For example, business and community leaders may lend support by volunteering space to house temporary detention centers, establishing community service projects that lead to after school or weekend jobs, or developing software to track truant.

#### ***5. Involve local law enforcement in truancy reduction efforts***

In order to enforce school attendance policies, school officials should establish close linkages with local police, probation officers, and juvenile and family court officials. Police Departments report favorably on community-run temporary detention centers where they can drop off truant youth rather than bring them to local police stations for time-consuming processing. When part of a comprehensive anti-truancy initiative, police sweeps of neighborhoods in which truant youth are often found can prove dramatically effective.

## **Model Truancy Reduction Initiatives**

Each community needs to determine how it will reduce and deter truancy. Below are descriptions of truancy programs being used in communities around the country which employ some or all of the elements described above.

### **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

*Program elements:* Parents, police, and the school system focus on the causes of truancy in the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS) initiative in Milwaukee. Attendance is taken every period in all high schools. Local police officers pick up truant students and bring them to a Boys and Girls Club for counseling. Parents are called at home automatically every night if their child did not attend school that day. If the parent is not supportive of regular school attendance, then the district attorney is contacted.

*Results:* In a recent sample of students who went through the TABS process, 73 percent returned to school the next day, 66 percent remained in school on the 15th day, and 64 percent still are in school 30 days later. Since the TABS initiative began, daytime burglary in Milwaukee has decreased 33 percent, and daytime aggravated battery has decreased 29 percent. Aquine Jackson, Director of the Parent and Student Services Division of the Milwaukee Public Schools, says, "I think the TABS program is so effective because it is a collaboration among...the Milwaukee

Public Schools, the Milwaukee Boys and Girls Clubs, the Milwaukee Police Department, and the County Sheriff, and because it is now a part of state statute that police officers can stop students on the street during school hours."

### **Rohnert Park, California**

*Program elements:* The Stop, Cite and Return Program is designed to reduce truancy and juvenile crime in the community and to increase average daily attendance for the schools. Patrol officers issue citations to suspected truants contacted during school hours, and students are returned to school to meet with their parents and a vice principal. Two citations are issued without penalty; the third citation results in referral to appropriate support services.

*Results:* Due in large part to this initiative, the daytime burglary rate is 75 percent below what it was in 1979. Haynes Hunter, who has worked in different capacities on the issue of truancy in Rohnert Park for over 15 years, says the program is effective because it is a "high visibility" effort. "Being on the street, being in contact with the kids makes them aware of the fact that we care. We want them to get their education."

### **New Haven, Connecticut**

*Program elements:* The Stay in School Program targets middle school students who have just begun to have problems. Targeted students go to truancy court, at which a panel of high school students question them and try to identify solutions. After court, youth and attorney mentors are assigned to each student for support. The student and the court sign a written agreement, and after two months, students return to the court to review their contract and report on their progress.

*Results:* Denise Keyes Page, who recruits and trains mentors for this initiative, says "This program works because it harnesses the power of peer pressure. Truants are judged and mentored by their peers, instead of just by adults who may seem distant and unconnected. Our program uses both the carrot and stick approaches, providing both supportive mentorship and real courtroom accountability to truant students. One of the evolving strengths of the program is that not only are we providing support to the truant, but we are serving as a resource to their parents."

### **Atlantic County, New Jersey**

*Program elements:* The Atlantic County Project Helping Hand receives referrals from six Atlantic City and four Pleasantville elementary schools for youth in K through eighth grades who have five to 15 days of unexcused absences. A truancy worker meets with the youth and family to provide short-term family counseling, usually up to eight sessions. Referrals for additional social services are made on an as needed basis. If the family fails to keep appointments, home visits are made to encourage cooperation. Once a truancy problem is corrected, the case is closed and placed on an aftercare/monitoring status with

contact made at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals to ensure that truancy does not persist.

*Results:* During the past school year, 84 percent of the students who participated in the Atlantic County program had no recurrence of truancy. Colleen Denelsback of project Helping Hand says that "our philosophy is one of early intervention, both at the age level and the number of unexcused absences. We stress that the earlier intervention takes place, the greater the chance for positive outcomes. Early intervention will prevent truancy and later delinquency."

### **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

*Program elements:* The THRIVE (Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education) initiative is a comprehensive anti-truancy program spurred by an ongoing community partnership of law enforcement, education, and social service officials. Police bring a suspected truant to a community-run detention center where, within one hour of arrival, officials assess the youth's school status, release the youth to a parent or relative, and refer the family to any needed social service agencies. Parents are notified by the district attorney of potential consequences for repeat behavior. Parents who harbor youth with 15 days of consecutive unexcused absences are subject to misdemeanor charges.

*Results:* Since THRIVE's inception in 1989, the Oklahoma City Police Department reports a 33 percent drop in daytime burglary rates. Tom Steemen, the parent of a student who went through THRIVE, says, "The first I heard of the program was when my son was caught and taken to the center. I was real glad to know they had something like THRIVE." His son Ken, age 15, says, "THRIVE shook me up. I knew (while in the police car) just how wrong I was."

### **Norfolk, Virginia**

*Program elements:* The Norfolk, Virginia school district uses software to collect data on students who are tardy, cut class, leave grounds without permission, are truant but brought back to school by police, or are absent without cause. Each school has a team composed of teachers, parents, and school staff that examines the data to analyze truancy trends. For example, a team may try to pinpoint particular locations where truant students are found during school hours and then place additional monitors in these locations. A team may also notice certain months when truancy is prevalent and then design special programs to curb truancy during those months.

*Results:* Ann Hall of the Norfolk Public Schools says, "Attendance has improved at all levels of schools since 1992 - two percent at the elementary and secondary levels. The overall district average is up one percent. This is significant in that legal attendance is at the 93rd percentile. Tighter attendance policies, grading practices, and teamwork have led to this improvement...There are few, if any, teachers complaining that discipline and law violations are not being handled consistently throughout the district. This is a marked improvement over the report that was made in the teacher satisfaction survey conducted in 1988."

## Marion, Ohio

*Program elements:* The Community Service Early Intervention Program focuses on potential truants during freshman year. Referred students are required to attend tutoring sessions as directed, give their time to community service projects, and participate in a counseling program. In addition, students are required to give back to the Intervention initiative by sharing what they have learned with new students in the program and by recommending others who might benefit. Parental participation is required throughout the program. Upon completion of the six-week sequence, school records relative to truancy are nullified. If the student fails the program, formal court intervention is the next step.

*Results:* Of the 28 students who took part in the program this semester, 20 have improved attendance records and will pass freshman year. The eight who did not improve their attendance records either moved from the school district or were removed from the school for failure to meet attendance requirements. Misty Swanger, Community Educator for this initiative, saw a general improvement in the grades and behavior of the students. Executive Director Christine Haas says, "This program is a combination of early intervention and early attention. As long as the child knows that someone is watching out for them and taking an interest in them, they will not be truant. The attention factor is very important. It creates success." The intervention program has already identified 100 ninth grade students with truancy problems to work with in the coming year.

## Peoria, Arizona

*Program elements:* In Operation Save Kids, school officials contact the parents of students with three unexcused absences. Parents are expected to relay back to school officials steps they have taken to ensure their children regularly attend school. When students continue to be truant, cases are referred to the local district attorney. To avoid criminal penalty and a \$150 parent fine, youth are required to participate in an intensive counseling program, and parents must attend a parenting skills training program.

*Results:* Since Operation Save Kids began two years ago, daytime juvenile property crime rates have declined by 65 percent. Truancy citywide has been cut in half. "Look at today's truant, and you're looking at tomorrow's criminal," says Assistant City Attorney Terry Bays Smith.

## Bakersfield, California

*Program elements:* A consortium of school districts in Kern County, California has formed the Truancy Reduction Program. Local schools reach out to youth with a history of truancy through parent contact, peer tutoring, and mentoring services. Persistently truant youth are referred to the County Probation Office. Probation officers visit parents at home one-on-one, check on the youth at school weekly, and in the majority of cases refer youth and their families to one or more needed social service agencies. The County Probation Office and local school continue to track the youth for a full year before making referral to the local District Attorney's Office.

*Results:* "The majority of graduates of the Truancy Reduction Program's first year no longer present a truancy problem," according to the Kern County Public Schools Coordinator, Steve Hageman. Over a fifth of that 1994 class had perfect school attendance records in the year following their participation.

## Resources

The U.S. Department of Justice provides federal funding to states to implement local delinquency prevention programs, including programs that address truancy. Many of these programs address risk and protective factors. A large portion of the funding has come from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Formula Grants Program that is administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs. For more information contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 1-800-638-8736.

Under a jointly-funded project, the Department of Justice and the Department of Education have developed a training and technical assistance project to help communities develop or enhance truancy prevention/intervention programs and programs that target related problems of youth out of the education mainstream. Training and technical assistance will be made available to 10 jurisdictions through a competitive application process in 1996. For more information contact Ron Stephens at the National School Safety Center, 805-373-9977.

For more information about the information presented in this guide, please call the U.S. Department of Education Safe and Drug Free Schools Office at 202-260-3954.

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