Chronic School Absenteeism: A Growing Problem

Findings & Recommendations

From the Truancy Work Committee of Hennepin County

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INTRODUCTION

Kids who are chronically truant and educationally neglected face a bleak future. Left unchecked, a child’s chronic absenteeism, even at the elementary school level, often foretells a future of delinquency or repeated involvement in the child protective system and leaves a child without the tools to have a productive work life.

Research shows that children who are likely to drop out of school or engage in other at-risk behaviors can be identified by third grade or earlier. Yet, few systematic approaches are in place to intervene with such children at an early age. As a result, the child begins a process of gradual disengagement from school. A student who is chronically absent falls behind his classmates academically and often faces an unwelcome attitude in the classroom, leaving him with little incentive to return to school.

Recently, people have begun to recognize that chronic absenteeism is often a symptom of underlying problems within a child’s life. These problems may reflect unresolved issues within the student, the home, the school, or the community. While there are currently many services available to address these issues, they are not delivered in a comprehensive way, and, therefore, their effects are often short-term and disjointed.

Two years ago, the Hennepin County Truancy Work Committee was convened by Family & Children’s Service. The Committee is comprised of representatives from the public schools; Juvenile Court; community based agencies; county departments of social services, mental health, and probation; law enforcement; and the Public Defender's and County Attorney's offices. Committee members have shown a tremendous commitment to the issues of educational neglect and truancy by meeting monthly to discuss concerns and recognize successes. The Committee has resolved to be the impetus for making educational neglect and truancy issues priorities in this community.

One important product from this group has been the identification of a continuum of intervention to meet the needs of children who are absent from school either due to problems in their families or their own volition (see Appendix 1). A service delivery continuum needs to be in place that allows for the earliest identification and least intrusive forms of intervention with chronically absent students so that only those cases which require the use of court and accompanying public social services are referred.

Another product which emerged from the Committee's discussions is the recent changes in the educational neglect law (see Appendix 2). These changes clarify that educational neglect falls within the Maltreatment of Minors Act. These
changes make clear the requirement that Child Protective Services do an assessment on all educational neglect reports.

Committee members have taken what they learned in these meetings back to their organizations and developed further individual and collaborative efforts to address chronic absenteeism. While these efforts have pushed the community forward to acknowledge educational neglect and truancy as serious problems, there is still work that needs to be done.

The report is organized as follows:

The Problem Statement highlights the problems of educational neglect and truancy in Hennepin County and demonstrates the negative implications of chronic absenteeism for students and the community in which they live.

Local Concerns discusses how the issues are approached by both the schools and Hennepin County agencies.

Innovative Programs outlines a number of local and national programs and initiatives that emphasize the importance of school attendance in obtaining an education.

Findings and Recommendations presents six findings and recommendations that address how Hennepin County agencies, schools, and communities might approach the issues of educational neglect and truancy through collaboration and cooperation.

Outcomes summarizes the improvements that the Truancy Work Committee hopes will be achieved if the recommendations are implemented.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Educational neglect and truancy are growing problems in Hennepin County and, more specifically, the Minneapolis Public Schools. This has resulted in tremendous costs to kids, the communities in which they live, and society as a whole.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Many children are absent from school each day. Chronic absenteeism has become a serious problem in Hennepin County and the Minneapolis Public Schools.

- A survey of Minnesota students found that skipping school was more prevalent in higher grades.\(^2\)
  - 15 percent of the 6th graders, 22 percent of the 9th graders, and 45 percent of the seniors admitted to skipping at least one day of school in the four weeks prior to the survey.

- In 1992, 1172 truancy citations were filed with Hennepin County Juvenile Court.

- During the 1991-92 school year, the average daily attendance (ADA) for the Minneapolis Public Schools was 90 percent, and ranged anywhere from 96.2 percent at Hale Elementary to 78 percent at Henry Senior High School.
  - The student population of the Minneapolis Public Schools was around 43,000.
  - Therefore, on any given day 4,300 students were not in school.

- The ADA for senior high schools in the Minneapolis Public Schools has been declining since 1987 (see Figure 1, Appendix 3).
  - Currently the ADA for the senior high schools is 85.6 percent.
  - The largest decrease was seen at Henry High School, where the ADA decreased 10 percent in only 5 years.
  - On any given day, almost one quarter of Henry's student population is not in school.

COSTS TO KIDS AND SOCIETY

Students who are chronically absent from school or drop out are not able to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in today's job market.

- Today, jobs in the United States require a median of 12.5 years of education.
• A 1988 study of high school dropouts, found that only one-half were employed full-time.\(^3\)

• In 1987, a high school graduate earned $244,212 more in his lifetime than a high school dropout.\(^4\)
  • This finding indicates that for each hour that a student spends in high school he earns an additional $56.53 in the future.

• 84.4 percent of high school dropouts would not recommend to their friends or relatives that they leave high school before graduating because of the need to obtain the diploma for employment purposes.\(^5\)

Students who are frequently absent from school often exhibit other at-risk or delinquent behaviors.

• Alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use; early sexual activity; vehicle accidents; depression/suicide; and anti-social behaviors often co-occur with school attendance problems (see Figure 2, Appendix 3).

• Youth are more likely to recidivate if their first Juvenile Court referral is for burglary, truancy, incorrigibility, arson, motor vehicle theft, or robbery.\(^6\)
  • Of the youth who were referred to Juvenile Court for truancy, 57 percent were later referred for another offense.

• The Hennepin County Attorney's Office and the Office of Planning and Development conducted a study of 180 children, who were age 10 and under and truant during the 1988-89 school year, and found that by 1992 one-sixth of these children had been charged with delinquent acts constituting over 80 separate crimes. These crimes included assault, damage to property, theft, and possession of a weapon.

• In 1992, Hennepin County Juvenile Court found that out of a sample of 100 delinquents 69 had a documented history of truancy.

• In Hennepin County, during the 1990-91 school year, 208 youth were ordered to complete a video lecture and two hours of work squad, as a result of a first-time truancy citation. 62 percent of these youth have since returned to court on another petition or citation.

Chronic absenteeism, and often the resulting dropping out, do not only negatively affect the student. The impact is also felt by the community in which the student lives and society as a whole.
• Reducing truancy may not only reduce losses of state aid to the schools, which result from student absences, but should also reduce the financial losses caused by daytime crime.\textsuperscript{7}

• Research has shown a 68 percent reduction in daytime crime just by getting truant kids off the streets. (See page 1, Appendix 5)

• In Minnesota, dropouts are increasing, despite declining enrollment.\textsuperscript{8}

• School dropouts consume more public services than do high school graduates.
  • For each additional year of secondary education completed, there is a 35 percent decrease in the probability of welfare dependency.\textsuperscript{9}

• There is a higher correlation between dropping out of school and ending up in prison than there is between smoking and lung cancer.\textsuperscript{10}
  • In 1992-93, Minnesota invested approximately $5,510 per public school student.
  • The average cost for incarceration for a juvenile in a detention center in Minnesota is $54,020 per year.
  • The average cost for incarceration for an adult in Minnesota is $26,525 per year.

• Studies have found that 71 percent of all prison inmates nationwide never completed high school.\textsuperscript{11}

• States with the highest high school graduation rates tend to have the lowest rates of prisoners per 100,000 population. Conversely, those with this highest incarceration rates also have the highest dropout rates.\textsuperscript{12}

• Experts from the Minnesota Business Partnership say that if we allow this problem to continue, the United States will not only lose leadership in world business, but also our freedom; since knowledge, understanding, and the discipline of clear thinking are required for decision making in a functioning democracy.\textsuperscript{13}

**CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS**

Students who are chronically absent have some common characteristics. These characteristics should not be looked upon as a cause of chronic absenteeism. Rather, unexcused absences may be a result of increased life stressors that these families face and the lack of resources available to address their needs.

• Students of color represent 55 percent of the student body for the Minneapolis
Public Schools. Yet, during the 1991-92 school year, 80 percent of the truancy citations were filed against students of color (see Figure 3, Appendix 3).

- 43 percent of the students in the Minneapolis Public Schools are members of single parent families. During the 1991-92 school year, 73 percent of the citations filed were filed against children living in single parent homes (see Figure 4, Appendix 3).

- It is likely that high student turnover rates are associated with high truancy rates. A student who moves often may not feel connected to his school and would, therefore, have little incentive to commit himself to attending school on a regular basis.

- In 1992, a study of nearly 300 chronically absent youth was completed by the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office. 80 percent of the families who had youth that were absent because of educational neglect or truancy were known to the public social service agency due to previous child protection reports and/or had received services in either child protection or family services (see Figure 5, Appendix 3).
  - 40 percent of the children and families had 1 - 3 previous non-truant contacts.
  - an additional 40 percent had 4 or more previous non-truant contacts.

- During the 1991-92 school year, Minneapolis Public School students who dropped out of school attended an average of 46 fewer days before dropping out, than students who stayed in school (see Figure 6, Appendix 3).

- Truancy is more common among students who have a history of reading difficulties.\(^1^4\)

- A 1984 study of 136 truant students, found that 84 percent of the students had completed 9th or 10th grade.\(^1^5\)
  - Only 11.5 percent of these students had reading and math competencies at or above the 7th grade level.
  - 35 percent were competent at only the pre-primary to 3rd grade level.
LOCAL CONCERNS

THE SCHOOLS

The district office for the Minneapolis Public Schools provides each school with policy guidelines, based on the current laws, for addressing chronic absenteeism for pre-K through twelfth grade (see Figures 1 and 2, Appendix 4). There have been concerns raised about whether these policies are consistently followed. Due to pending changes in the court referral process, the schools may need to re-evaluate their current procedures for dealing with educational neglect and truancy.

Additionally, there is no written policy for the schools to follow that differentiates between excused and unexcused absences. This means that a student’s absence that is excused in one school may not be in another. This leads to confusion on the part of the parents and the children, and may be an opportunity lost for early intervention.

After identifying habitual truants, it is expected that the school will use its resources, and, perhaps, those of a local community organization, to provide services for the student and family prior to a court referral being made. However, many referrals reach court with few attempts at intervention. Unfortunately, very limited school resources, staff or money, have been allocated to truancy issues. The Minneapolis School District currently has eight truancy workers in the middle schools to provide services to truant youth and their families. In addition, these workers provide services to 11 elementary schools on an on-call basis. In the high schools and other elementary schools, the school social worker is expected to provide services for chronically absent students and their families.

There has also been concern about the increasing number of educationally neglected children who are entering the system. In June 1993, a Student Attendance Survey was sent to all school social workers in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Of the elementary schools that responded, the problem of unexcused absences is seen to be most severe for kindergartners. Yet, many school social workers admit to not making attendance a priority because of other duties. Reasons given include: 1) no time or resources to address such issues, 2) uncooperative parents, 3) families who do not have phones or move often, and 4) a lack of feedback and positive results from Hennepin County agency involvement.

Another reason school social workers have very little time to deal with chronic absenteeism is due to the reimbursement requirements of the State Department of Education. The State will pay 66 percent of the school social worker’s salary if the worker spends 80 percent of his time working with special education students, and the other 20 percent preventing the entrance of other children into special
education. Currently, 11 percent of the student population in Minneapolis Public Schools are classified in need of special education services. Yet, large numbers of students who are chronically absent, and often in need of special services, are going unidentified. Some chronically absent students may be classified in need of special education services if they stayed in school long enough to be tested. Others need special help catching up on their lessons and being re-integrated into school.

Ideally, a student should not accumulate more than 20 days of unexcused absences before a truancy citation is filed. However, this past year Juvenile Court received numerous citations with students missing 40 or more days prior to the first citation being filed.

HENNEPIN COUNTY AGENCIES

Hennepin County’s response to truancy and educational neglect has been disjointed and often seen as ineffective. Lack of communication between county agencies has further perpetuated this ineffectiveness. Based on the child’s age, there are three separate procedures for county processing of school attendance problems. This has led to confusion for school personnel. Various divisions in the County have often been at odds with each other over who’s responsible for these cases. As a result, families are not receiving needed services or services are duplicated within the County.

Truancy

For students ages 11 and older, the Truancy Citation from the school is filed by the school-liaison police officer, who forwards it to the Violations Bureau, which also handles all traffic tickets. The Violations Bureau then forwards the citation to Juvenile Court.

One concern of people who work with students who are habitually truant is the length of time it takes the Court to respond to the youth’s behavior. For example:

- it takes at least two weeks for a citation to move from the Violations Bureau to Juvenile Court
- it takes two to four weeks for a student’s appearance to be scheduled on the lecture calendar
- it also takes two to four weeks to schedule an arraignment hearing
- if a student does not appear in court when scheduled, his next scheduled arraignment could be at least a month down the road.
For these reasons, students who are truant could potentially miss nine months of school without appearing in court at all. This abscence of swift and sure responses often reinforces truant behavior.

School personnel often voice concerns about the lack of response by the Court to truant youth. Many school staff members who work with truant youth do not believe that the truancy lecture and education program for first-time offenders sufficiently addresses a student's truant behavior, and, therefore, students are not deterred from skipping school. The follow-up information on the 208 students who completed the lecture during the 1990-91 school year appears to support this contention, since 62 percent of them have returned to court on another citation or petition.

With an average of over 1,200 citations filed each year, Juvenile Court becomes over-burdened and, therefore, unable to adequately respond to the student's needs. Arraignment hearings are held each Tuesday from October 15 through June 8. They are presided over by two Court Referees who each hear between 17 and 20 cases at a time. Due to these scheduling constraints, Juvenile Court only accepts truancy citations up to April 15 each year. Therefore, students who are truant during the last two months of school do not have citations filed against them. As a result, the student must become a habitual truant again the following year before action is taken. There is no continuity from one year to the next. This lack of response to the student's truant behavior also tends to promote such behavior.

Educational Neglect

Until this year, educational neglect was not a priority of the Bureau of Social Services, and there was no effective process for workers to respond to educational neglect referrals. School personnel were frustrated with the response because there seemed to be no resolution to the problem.

Many families did not meet the Child Protection assessment criteria and were not opened for services. Others referred to the Bureau of Social Services for educational neglect were offered home-based services. These services were considered voluntary in nature, and if families refused to cooperate, there was no way the services could be backed up with court action. As a result, the cases were then closed by home-based services with no changes for the family, only to surface again as school attendance concerns.

Until last year educational neglect petitions were also a low priority of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office. Prior to this time, only a handful of educational neglect petitions were brought before the Court.
This ineffective response by the county not only sent a message to the schools that it was not worth the effort to complete the educational neglect forms, but also to the parents that nothing would happen to them if their children were not in school.

Recently, a proposal has been developed that would alter the approach of Hennepin County agencies to truancy and educational neglect petitions. This proposal will be outlined in the following section.
INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

The increasing awareness of unexcused absences as a symptom of other problems, and the fact that the legal system is more over-burdened than ever, has forced many schools and communities to develop innovative truancy prevention programs (see Appendix 5 for national programs).

These programs focus on the underlying issues behind chronic absenteeism. Many of the programs recognize the need for collaboration of services and communication by the various agencies involved. The Truancy Work Committee has identified a number of innovative programs in Hennepin County which support the belief that early intervention and a cooperative effort of service providers is the most effective way to address the issues of absenteeism.

TRUANCY ACTION PROJECT (TAP)

The Truancy Action Project was a pilot project initiated in February, 1993 to test aspects of the truancy continuum developed by the Truancy Work Committee. Program workers provided services to students of Lincoln (K-5), Northeast Middle (6-8), and Waite Park (4-6). Funding for the program was provided by grants from the General Mills Foundation and the Honeywell Foundation.

The ability of the TAP program to provide a number of services to truant students was dependent on the cooperation of the agencies involved. The persons included in this effort were volunteers from Hennepin County Court Services, a truancy worker from the Minneapolis Public Schools, teachers from Waite Park Elementary, and workers from Eastside Neighborhood Services.

The program provided services for truant youth along the continuum, from early intervention through Juvenile Court hearings.

1) The "Flying Squad"
The "flying squad" consisted of a staff volunteer from Hennepin County Court Services and a truancy worker from the Minneapolis Public Schools. If a student was absent, and had a chronic truancy problem, the "flying squad" used a Hennepin County van to visit the home of the child in order to return the child to school with the permission of the parents. While at the home, the worker would present the parent with information about services available to the family. If the parent voiced interest, the worker would complete a referral form for that service. Following each visit, the "flying squad" would complete a report about the visit which would be used for future planning.
One of the strengths of the "flying squad" was its immediate follow-up on students who were truant. The daily contact and pick-up helped the parents and students realize the importance the school and community placed on daily attendance, while at the same time the workers gained a better understanding of the family situations.

2) School Survival Course
This after-school program was implemented at Waite Park. Transportation was provided by Eastside Neighborhood Services. The class, led by volunteer staff from Waite Park, met one afternoon a week to work on skills necessary to make it in school.

The school survival program led to increased attendance in 15 out of 16 students. Many of the students did not like the school work they had to do, however, they did enjoy the one-on-one attention provided to them by the teachers and the other special group activities. The program was implemented only in Waite Park, because transportation could not be accessed for students in the other two schools.

3) Referral of TAP students to Juvenile Court
The goal of this part of the program was to expedite the referral of TAP students to Juvenile Court. This was done by the Court taking direct referrals from the schools, rather than going through the Violations Bureau, and setting aside time to hear TAP student cases, rather than scheduling them on the regular hearing calendar. The rational was: 1) truancy could be reduced if students received immediate consequences for their behavior, and 2) schools would be more willing to follow through with court consequences if the results could be seen more quickly.

Eight of the 53 students served by TAP were referred to Juvenile Court. Truancy workers found that expediting the referrals was advantageous in stressing the importance of school attendance to the juveniles. One of the problems with the TAP hearing was that students who did not show for the hearing were rescheduled onto the regular hearing calendar. In those cases the process for TAP students took just as long as non-TAP students.

The Truancy Action Project served 53 students from the three schools; 39 of these students improved their attendance. Due to this success, grant requests have been completed for funding the TAP program in all middle schools this coming fall. TAP participants met in June and generated a number of recommendations for the 1993-94 school year. The most important recommendation is that the program start at the beginning of the school year. This would increase the effectiveness of the program by dealing with truant students before a habit of truancy is developed. Other recommendations of the Truancy Action Project include the need to contact non-profit agencies prior to the coming fiscal year so funds and resources can be
set aside to assist with the program; the need for a peer group while students are waiting for a court date; and the need to place a greater emphasis on younger students before truancy becomes a way of life.

INITIATIVES OF HENNEPIN COUNTY AGENCIES

Hennepin County Attorney’s Office

The Hennepin County Attorney’s Office (HCAO) has recently taken steps to deal with the increasing number of elementary students who are absent due to educational neglect. In the Spring of 1993, the HCAO began accepting petition requests for elementary students directly from the schools. The goal of the program was to enforce compulsory school attendance laws and help secure services for elementary students and their families.

The HCAO received 74 petition requests through the month of June, 54 of which were accepted for filing. Due to the newness of the program, attendance outcomes have not yet been tabulated. However, some common features were found for the cases that were accepted. Ninety-two percent of the cases accepted had a history of contact with public social service agencies. Other common features include chaotic home conditions, the child being improperly cared for, the child having significant special needs, the family having a history of unstable residences, and most of the children missing 30 or more full days without a legal excuse.

These findings support the belief of the Truancy Work Committee that chronic absenteeism and its underlying problems need to be addressed early in a child’s life to break the cycle of unexcused absences.

Community Corrections-Juvenile Probation, Juvenile Court, and the Bureau of Social Services

In response to the concerns raised by the schools and communities, Hennepin County Community Corrections-Juvenile Probation, Juvenile Court, and the Bureau of Social Services have proposed new policies and allocated more resources toward addressing truancy and educational neglect referrals.

The first step of the proposal would be to replace the current citation process with a central intake process for all referrals from the schools in the form of a CHIPS petition. These petitions would be divided into two categories, 11 and under and 12 through 15.
Recently passed legislation now presumes that children under 12 who are truant are considered educationally neglected. Therefore, a child protective assessment will be completed on all of these referrals. It is estimated that there are about 700 kids affected by this legislation. In order to deal with these additional referrals, 10 new positions have been approved as an Elementary Truancy Unit.

After the child protective assessment, all cases would be referred to a screening team which would determine the appropriate agency intervention. The child and families would have a set time period to work with the assigned agency to rectify the chronic absenteeism problem. If the absences continue, the Bureau of Social Services would then file a petition with the Court.

Referrals for students 12 through 15 would go immediately to a screening team which would determine how each referral should be handled. Some examples include mediation or community services, a truancy lecture, or a referral to the 12 to 15 year old truancy unit for assessment and case management. If the youth continues to be truant, a CHIPS petition would then be filed with the Court.

Beginning in the Fall of 1992, the video lecture and 2 hours of work squad for first-time offenders was replaced with a video lecture and education program. This program stresses the importance of staying in school. Parents are encouraged to participate in the program. Of the 271 students ordered to complete the video lecture and education program during the 1992-93 school year, 150 (55 percent) had one or more parent participate.

One component of the video lecture and education program which is still being developed is a Peer Group. Along with first-time truants, participants of the Peer Group will include youth who dropped out of school at one point, and have since returned. The discussions will center around the personal experiences of the dropouts, and the value of an education.

LEARNING READINESS (SCHOOL/HUMAN SERVICES REDESIGN INITIATIVE)

There are 11 Learning Readiness Projects that are funded jointly by the United Way and Hennepin County. The focus of three of the projects in the Minneapolis schools is to improve the attendance of children involved in the program.

The three Learning Readiness projects in the Minneapolis schools are Eastside Neighborhood Services, which serves Tuttle School (K-6); Family and Children's Services, which serves Cooper (K-3) and Wilder (4-6); and Minneapolis American Indian Center, which serves Hiawatha, Cooper, and Howe (all K-3) schools with
Native American children. These projects focus interventions on young students with the intent that regular school attendance becomes the norm for the student, rather than chronic absenteeism.

There are two strategies used in all three programs: 1) home visits, and 2) personal contact to build relationships with the parents and identifying and addressing issues behind truancy. In all cases, the success of the strategy is based on the individual attention given to the absent child and her family. Other strategies used include after-school groups, contracts with rewards for good attendance, alarm clocks, and using workers from the same culture as the truant students.

Results show that there has been some improvement in attendance in all three projects. Staff involved in the program state that relationships are the key to improvement. Other findings indicate that chronic absenteeism issues must be addressed in the elementary years, attendance increases as family stability increases, and it appears that schools do not aggressively document unexcused absences because experience has shown that little is done with it.

**TRUANCY PREVENTION TEAM**

The Truancy Prevention Team is comprised of school personnel from the Robbinsdale Area Schools, local police, Northwest YMCA youth outreach workers, and North Hennepin Mediation staff. The Team began in September, 1991. Its goal is to help kids stay in school and complete their education.

The Team uses the truancy continuum to approach truancy issues in their community. Emphasis is placed on early identification of students and immediate intervention when a truant student has been identified. After the school identifies a truant student, school personnel and the police meet with the student and her family to stress the importance of staying in school, and the consequences for not doing so. Some students were offered the opportunity to sign contracts regarding school attendance as alternatives to court referrals. If the student does not return to school following the initial meeting, a more thorough assessment of the problem is completed, and the family is referred to the appropriate agencies.

Other services provided include a seminar for youth and their parents co-sponsored by the schools, police, North Hennepin Medication Project, and the Northwest YMCA; conflict resolution training and mediation services for the family and between family and school staff provided by North Hennepin Mediation Project; and counseling provided by the Northwest YMCA youth outreach workers.
The Team has gained the support of the community and shop owners at the Crystal Shopping Center and Gallery. If merchants see students who appear to be truant, they will stress the importance of school attendance and education for obtaining jobs in their shop as well as anywhere in the community.

Preliminary results suggest that the diversionary contracts appeared to have some positive impact on school attendance of the youth who participated in this aspect of the program. Students who signed contracts had increased school attendance during the duration of their contracts. However, once the contracts were completed, school attendance for the youth again declined.

Cooperation between agencies is the key to success for the Truancy Prevention Team. For example, the seminar for youth and their parents was poorly attended when the school sent the meeting announcement to the families. However, when the Crystal Police Department sent the notice to the families, indicating that failure to attend could result in a referral to Juvenile Court, attendance improved dramatically. These results indicate that police involvement may provide the leverage necessary to gain family cooperation prior to court involvement.

**FAMILY MEDIATION**

Family Mediation is a service provided by the Citizens Council Mediation Services. One of the goals of the program is to resolve family conflicts, or conflicts the family may have with the school, which lead to chronic absenteeism. The mediator is a neutral party that helps the family members identify issues they would like to see resolved, and then helps the family reach an agreement in resolving the issues. Following the agreement, the mediator monitors the family weekly for eight weeks to make sure the agreement is working. If the conflict returns, the mediator will offer to again work with the family.

This is the third year that family mediation services have been in place. In the first year most of the referrals came from Juvenile Court. These last two years, families were primarily referred to mediation services by the schools. These referrals were made between the time the Attorney's warning letters were sent and the citations were filed at the Violations Bureau.

There has also been an increase in the use of mediation to address chronic absenteeism. During its first year of operation, only 22 truancy cases were referred to mediation. Since that time, there has been a 32 percent increase in referrals. A total of 146 cases have been referred in the past three years.

Of the 146 referrals received by May 23, 1993, 40 percent were completed successfully, 18 percent were still in the mediation process, and 42 percent did not
complete the mediation process. This means that the family may have either declined mediation or failed at mediation. If mediation was not completed, the family continued through the regular school/court truancy citation process.

Mediation is seen as a diversion from Juvenile Court either in a formal or informal manner. If the Court refers the family for mediation, an agreement is made that the charges will be dismissed after 90 days if the mediation is successful with eliminating truancy. The use of mediation is one way to reduce the number of truants referred to Juvenile Court.

**BACK TO SCHOOL/STAY IN SCHOOL**

Back to School/Stay in School is a program funded by the NAACP which provides services to 30 African-American youth to help them stay in school and fosters their desire to learn.

The program has been active for three years, and has two components which work in conjunction with each other. The first component provides tutorial help and counseling during the school year to student participants after school hours and on Saturdays. The program also has direct contact with Minneapolis Public Schools to verify the student's attendance.

The second component, the six week residential school in the summer makes the program unique not only in the Minneapolis area, but also in the country. Thirty selected students participate in the six week program where the major objective is to modify the student's negative attitudes and behaviors that hinder the success of the student in school. Some students are court ordered to participate in the program, others are referred by schools, parents, social workers, counselors, and by the students themselves. Only the most truant and most disruptive students are accepted. The average number of days missed by these students is 40 days, but some students have actually missed the whole school year.

Students participate in a very structured schedule from 6:30 am to 10:30 pm daily. During the day, students attend classes from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm. At the end of each week, students receive awards for academic performance, good behavior, and class participation. Upon completion of the six week session, students are honored with a graduation ceremony and receive up to a $250 stipend for completing the program. Students also have the potential to earn up to five credits towards graduation.

Parent involvement is not only encouraged, but required at all stages of the Back to School/Stay in School program. The program works with parents to modify the student’s negative behaviors and poor school attendance. Workers also help the family connect with the appropriate service providers in the community.
The students in the program complain about the rigid schedule and about the amount of school work they have to do in six weeks, yet most are glad to have participated in it. The students believe that the best part of the program is that teachers and staff really care that they are in class daily and care about their success. The results have been improved school attendance and students working well above the grade level they had achieved during the school year.

This is one program that has been successful, even on a shoestring budget. The staff cares about the student as a person, and this caring has been reflected in their achievements behaviorally and academically.
THE TRUANCY WORK COMMITTEE'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many public and private agencies in our community have recognized the importance of school attendance, and have developed successful strategies and programs to support the goal of regular school attendance. Yet, there are children and families who are still not being served. The following findings and recommendations emphasize that collaboration of community efforts and cooperation by these agencies are essential to meet the needs of chronically absent students and their families.

FINDING #1 - COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Most people in our community would be surprised at the extent of truancy, educational neglect, and the associated costs to children and society. A community culture that supports education as an important value for all children is imperative. Providing information is an important first step for raising community awareness. Truant students often do not appreciate the lifelong consequences of a failed education. In addition, most parents want their children to get an education, but do not know where to turn if they need help getting their children to school.

RECOMMENDATION #1

The City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and the public schools should pool their public relations resources to mount an ongoing media campaign to promote the value of education and to increase school attendance. This effort should begin by Fall, 1993. Members of the Truancy Work Committee will be happy to work with media experts on this task.

One part of the campaign should be a media blitz to sell the value of education to the students and community, and inform them of the consequences for skipping school and dropping out. Extra efforts should be made to alert parents to school registration and start dates, and their educational responsibilities to their children. Information should be provided to parents about the availability of resources in the community to assist with family problems and issues surrounding educational neglect and truancy.

Public relations funds should also be used for support of specific programs in the schools. Schools should have the resources available to provide information to
families which could take the form of an educational video on chronic absenteeism and brochures for parents. Second, a district-wide "Truancy Newsletter" should be established to provide information to school personnel about successful truancy projects.

**FINDING #2 - FAMILY ADVOCACY**

Problems with school attendance can be related to problems within the school, community, and family. Working with parents is crucial to the success of efforts to respond to truancy and educational neglect. Many parents of truant students report feeling frustrated and overwhelmed by their efforts to negotiate the school system and/or the court system in order to get services for their child. At the same time these institutions are frustrated with parents who appear to be unconcerned or uninvolved with their child's education. Feeling alienated from school may be one reason students skip. A cause for the alienation may be the cultural and family differences between the students and their teachers. These differences may also be a barrier to communication between the schools and parents. Family advocates can help parents and students have a stronger voice in the decisions that are impacting their lives.

**RECOMMENDATION #2**

Continue funding of the Family Support Workers already established in the schools. Encourage development of new efforts to provide family advocacy and services to work with the schools to meet the needs of a culturally diverse community. Because workers who identify themselves as county or school personnel can find it difficult to develop rapport with a family, the best source of family advocates may be non-traditional community-based agencies.

Federal funding for the Family Support Workers is only guaranteed through December 1993. Following the end of the grant period, local monies should be made available to support and expand the role of these workers to include a chronic absenteeism focus.

In addition, efforts should be made to enlist and expand the support of any already existing family advocacy resources.

**FINDING #3 - COMMUNITY-BASED TRUANCY ACTION MODEL**

Schools often lack the resources for the kind of early intervention necessary to adequately address a child's absence from school. Yet, schools in concert with
community agencies are in the best position to succeed in their efforts to get children to return to school and stay in school. Each school needs to be part of a community-based strategy to make school attendance a priority and help keep children in school.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Develop a community-based truancy action model at each school site. This model would consist of an interdisciplinary approach for handling the issues of educationally neglected and truant children, and continue to expand on the Truancy Action Project (see page 11 for a description of the program). This model should be developed in three Minneapolis planning communities and the Robbinsdale School sites and pilot-tested in conjunction with the Hennepin County School/Human Services Redesign Initiative.

This model must have the support of community members to be successful. This support can be achieved by identifying community stakeholders who would be responsible for developing each particular community's strategy and driving the policy and operations of the model.

The experience of the Truancy Action Project (TAP) and its component parts should be considered in the development of this community-based model. One component of TAP that would need to be further developed is the Truancy Action Panel which would be comprised of representatives of community agencies who would meet with families to assess their needs and refer them to the appropriate agencies to meet those needs.

The emphasis of this program should be on schools and agencies working together with the parent and student to meet both the educational and social service needs of the families prior to court intervention. These agencies should work as family advocates to help the families access school services, public social services, and finally, court services when necessary.

FINDING #4 - SCHOOL POLICIES/SERVICES

Truancy and educational neglect do not receive priority attention in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Although the district office for the Minneapolis Public Schools does provide each school with written policy guidelines for chronic absenteeism, no comprehensive strategy exists to address educational neglect and truancy issues. Schools, however, cannot do this alone. They have not addressed these issues, in part, because they have become discouraged in some instances by the lack of
support from the courts, public social services, and the community to back up these efforts.

Schools need to specifically address concerns that children who have attendance and performance problems are systematically "pushed out" because of the lack of attention and/or resources to help them become successful at school. As stated previously, students often feel alienated from school, and this decreases their self-esteem. The student's self-esteem is further decreased when she does return to school after a long absence. The student has usually fallen behind academically and may face an unwelcome attitude in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Schools need to incorporate a strategy to address truancy and educational neglect as a part of their site-based management. This strategy should include increasing staff sensitivity to the changing family characteristics of the student population, re-evaluating current school attendance policies, providing re-entry services for absent students, and expanding already existing attendance programs in the school. In addition, elements of the community-based truancy action model described above are consistent with these purposes. With site-based management, there is great potential to implement the strategy that is necessary to address the truancy and educational neglect problems.

Steps need to be taken to increase the current staffs' sensitivity to the changing family characteristics of the student population, for example the issues of working families, single parent families, low-income families, families who move often, and culturally diverse families. Staff support needs to be enlisted to address not only the current chronic absenteeism policies, but also the issues surrounding truancy and educational neglect. Administrators need to re-evaluate the current policy of out-of-school suspension for truant students, since this reinforces a student's attitude about school attendance.

There needs to be re-entry services for students who have attendance problems, including development of Individual Attendance Plans (IAP's)-- similar to IEP's for special education students-- for all chronically absent students. Contact needs to be strengthened and maintained with parents regarding student absences. It is imperative that parents are contacted the first time a student is absent, as well as each subsequent time. When community agencies are used to provide services for the chronically absent student and his family, liaison between the schools, the families, and the agencies needs to be stronger.

Planning should be done within the schools to determine whether provision of student attendance services requires more resources or simply a reallocation of
existing resources. Continued funding should be provided for the Youth Coordinators that are currently working in 10 of the Minneapolis Public Schools and the Family Support Workers. Many schools may need additional staff resources to provide support for improved attendance efforts.

FINDING #5 - COURT AND PUBLIC AGENCY REDESIGN

Until recently Hennepin County agencies were not effectively responding to educational neglect complaints, and the system for responding to truancy citations continues to be over-burdened. Families with chronically absent children have often had prior contact with public social service agencies, however, there has been little communication between agencies and not enough effort directed to the resolution of the child's and family's problems. Furthermore, communication within the county continues to be impeded by the current data privacy laws. Families find it discouraging to deal with more than one caseworker, and agencies may waste time by gathering information that is already on file somewhere.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Support the current efforts within Hennepin County to redesign its approach to the handling of truancy and educational neglect cases to include streamlining the court referral process, a multi-disciplinary screening of all court referrals, developing diversion services, and supporting existing programs.

The emphasis of the redesign effort is to streamline the court referral process for truancy and educational neglect. This would begin by replacing the current citation procedure with a petition process. This replacement would eliminate the amount of time it takes now for the citations to be routed through the Violation Bureau prior to reaching Juvenile Court. The implementation of a central intake process for all referrals would eliminate some of the overlap in agency referrals. A multi-disciplinary screening team would be developed to review each referral and determine the appropriate agency response, such as pre-court diversionary services, child protection, child mental health, or home-based services, or a court referral. This new process should alleviate some of the over-crowding in Juvenile Court by providing the suitable services for children and families for whom court intervention is inappropriate.

In order to offer some a number of services for the families in need, funding support needs to be available to develop diversion services for truancy court referrals. There are currently some effective programs that could be used as diversion services. One that has been successful is the Family Mediation Program
offered by the Citizen's Council (see page 16 for a description of Family Mediation). Another program that has proven its effectiveness is the Back to School/Stay in School Program that is funded by the NAACP (see page 17 for a description of the Back to School/Stay in School Program). At this time, the program can only offer services to about 30 African-American youth, and there are many on the waiting list. These programs should be substantially expanded. Additional funding would enable this and other programs to serve more children and families that are in need. This would likely decrease the need for and cost of court intervention.

FINDING #6 - STUDENT SERVICE CENTER

Presently, youth wandering the streets when they should be in school are generally ignored. The community does not fully appreciate the extent of the problem these youth represent. In addition, chronically truant kids who "hang around" are often targets for pedophiles, as well as other forms of crime and victimization. Many of these youth could be protected as well as diverted from court through early assessment of their needs. Others will need substantial help with re-entry and transition into their community schools.

Studies have shown that keeping youth in school decreases the community's daytime burglaries, auto theft, and other types of crimes which saves thousands of dollars for its citizens. Discussion with officers from Minneapolis Park Police indicates that there are large numbers of school-aged youth "just hanging" around local parks and other areas during the day when they should be in school. Some of these youth attend school in St. Paul but cross the border to Minneapolis when they are skipping classes and vice versa. Then too, the Mega-Mall is an attractive escape for youth from both counties who wish to avoid classroom studies. When police pass by truant youth and take no action, the youth begin to believe that skipping school and loitering are acceptable behaviors. Such idleness often leads to increased delinquent activity.

San Jose solved a similar problem by assigning special police officers to pick up truant youth and take them to a centralized assessment center (page 1, Appendix 5). The San Jose Program decreased daytime crime rates 68 percent. In addition, they boast of an 80 percent success rate in redirecting truant students back to school. The San Jose model was and continues to be so successful that Oklahoma City began a similar program in 1989. Effective intervention with truants decreased Oklahoma City's daytime burglary rates 30 percent and their school absenteeism from 10 to four percent per day (see page 3, Appendix 5).
RECOMMENDATION #6

A detailed study should be conducted by December, 1993, to explore the feasibility of establishing a program similar to the San Jose and Oklahoma City models in the Twin Cities Metro area. Hennepin and Ramsey counties should consider pooling their resources to establish a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural "Student Service Center" for processing unsupervised youth found roaming the streets or shopping malls during the day when they should be in school.

Such a center might be centrally located on the border between the two counties, and staffed by school personnel, county workers, and volunteers from community agencies. The school districts should provide multi-cultural staff who can assess the child's mental and chemical health and family needs. County staff should be able to access the appropriate social services, whether private or public, to meet these needs. Volunteer staff and student interns could be trained to help process the youth, greet them, and provide friendly emotional support to them and their families.

Police officers for the program should be specially selected to insure that they like and have the best interest of children in mind. They should be representative of the multi-cultural communities they serve and should work at the direction of the community in a "Community Policing" model. They should be trained specifically in juvenile procedures and school policies.

Collaboration and support from the counties' child protection, court, and probation divisions is assumed in this model. Juveniles would be referred to court as a last resort when less intrusive methods to elicit cooperation and improved school attendance had failed. Educational neglect referrals would occur in some cases where attempts to improve the school attendance of younger children had failed due to lack of parental concern and cooperation.

This program would require that Minnesota statutes be changed to allow police to take truant youth into custody and transport them to the Student Service Center.

The program could be financed through a reallocation of some police officers that would likely be possible due to reduced police time needed to process daytime criminal activity and increased state aid to schools for increased attendance of their students. In return for the financial support provided by the counties, early intervention might reduce the number of youth involved in the "system" and, therefore, decrease the costs to the counties. Finally, business foundations may be willing to supplement such an effort since keeping youth in school is a step toward insuring more qualified future employees. Similar truancy programs have received help in the form of donated furniture and equipment as well as special grants.
OUTCOMES

If the Truancy Work Committee’s recommendations are implemented, the following outcomes should be achieved.

- Appropriate intervention will occur according to the continuum developed by the Truancy Work Committee.

- Increased communication within county agencies and between county and school agencies will lead to a more consistent and cohesive approach to serving families.

- Attendance monitoring will be improved within each school.

- Youth and families with developing chronic absenteeism problems will be identified early.

- With early identification and effective intervention, the number of youth who are in need of court related services will decrease.

- The court system will respond more swiftly and effectively to the cases which do require the power of the court for resolution.

- Successful students will build a productive workforce.

- Helping kids succeed in school will decrease the community’s costs for
  - more prisons
  - welfare dependency
  - social services
  - court intervention
  - unemployment

- The number of daytime delinquencies committed by juveniles will decrease.
ENDNOTES


5 Tidwell, R.


8 Minnesota State Planning Agency


12 Ibid


TRUANCY WORK COMMITTEE

Jill Alverson  Hennepin County Family & Children’s Mental Health
Bob Baffa  Henry High School
Ref. Tanya Bransford  Hennepin County Juvenile Court
Andre Bullock  Victim/Offender Mediation
Marie Capra  The City, Inc.
Herman Carmona  Mental Health Truancy Worker
Susan Carstens  Crystal Police Department
Mary Cichon  Hennepin County Family & Children’s Mental Health
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Michael Huert  Henry High School
Kris Jackson  Sanford Junior High School
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Jeff Wagner           Assistant Public Defender
Janet Wiig            Hennepin County Attorney's Office
Barb Wiley            Mental Health Truancy Worker
Terry Zelinsky        Minneapolis Public Schools
APPENDIX 1
# TRUANCY CONTINUUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1: Early Identification</th>
<th>Level 2: School</th>
<th>Level 3: Pre-Court Interdisciplinary Referral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITERIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* excessive excused or unexcused absences (under 7 days); and</td>
<td>* child has met statutory definition of &quot;habitual truant&quot; (absent more than 7 days); and</td>
<td>* assessment beyond that listed in Level 2 is needed; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* children transitioning with history of absenting; or</td>
<td>* parents unresponsive to attempts to ensure child's educational needs are met; or</td>
<td>* child still not regularly attending school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* siblings who are chronically absent; or</td>
<td>* child still not back in school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* frequent tardiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ACTIONS/PROCESS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ACTIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ACTIONS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* send notice of future actions by school/police/courts if child continues absenting;</td>
<td>* send notice of potential future actions by school/police/courts (atty letter);</td>
<td>* Refer to interdisciplinary team which will: (if school desires, it can also provide and/or participate in these assessments and referrals).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* call family to inform of truancy;</td>
<td>* ASSESSMENT - conducted by assigned person(s)</td>
<td>- conduct more thorough assessment of attitudes and family problems that lead to truant behavior;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* home visit (money issue);</td>
<td><strong>1. Gather information from parents, teachers, school nurse, school social worker.</strong></td>
<td>- conduct psychological evaluation if need indicated;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2. Information Needed: (keep records)</strong></td>
<td>- conduct interagency assessment to identify best referral for child/family;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* other agency involvement with family, if any; signs of abuse/neglect;</td>
<td>- act as case manager/referral agency:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* family/child needs and services being provided by other agencies (need release of information from parents)</td>
<td>- Bureau of Social Services (BOSS) (to immediately assign social worker if appropriate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* evaluation of child's educational needs to see if they match with the program s/he is in (i.e., possible need for spec. ed. assessment; learning style of child; ethnic and cultural issues)</td>
<td>- Police/Diversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3. Actions (document interventions)</strong></td>
<td>- Community Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* adjust child's educational program</td>
<td>- outreach workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* refer family to outside agencies who can address social service needs (i.e., poverty problems, childcare, transportation.)</td>
<td>- provide follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1 - 1
## TRUANCY CONTINUUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 4: Petition/Citation or Criminal Prosecution</th>
<th>Level 5: Adjudication and Disposition Trial and Sentencing</th>
<th>Level 6: Supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITERIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pre-court referral services have failed; and</td>
<td>• child found to be truant as result of citation; and/or</td>
<td>• child has received a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• parents unresponsive or resistant to attempts to ensure child's educational needs are met; and/or</td>
<td>• child found to be in need of protection and services due to educational neglect</td>
<td>disposition; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• parents unable to get services or dispute appropriateness of recommended services;</td>
<td></td>
<td>• a case plan has been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• child still not regularly attending school;</td>
<td></td>
<td>developed for the family; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• meets statutory definition/violation of compulsory attendance laws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTIONS/PROCESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• referral from school/police/community organization to contain documentation and detailed data of attempted interventions.</td>
<td>• establish calendar for truancy adjudications (trials)</td>
<td>• assigned probation officer or child protection worker will:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Screening/Diversion - conducted by a person(s) who can negotiate both social services and probation systems.</td>
<td>• dispositional options - full array - individualized to child’s/family’s needs.</td>
<td>- provide intensive supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decisions:</td>
<td></td>
<td>- conduct periodic reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. court involvement or not;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. citation or petition;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. court services or child protection to handle case;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Private CHIPS Petition (if Bureau refuses services or there's a dispute as to appropriate services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1 - 2
APPENDIX 2
COMPULSORY INSTRUCTION

Every child between the ages of seven and 16 years is subject to compulsory instruction laws, which require instruction for at least 170 days each year. A school district may implement a policy which also subjects five and six year olds to compulsory instruction laws.

Minn. Stat. 120.101 Subd. 5

EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT NOW INCLUDED IN REPORTING OF MALTREATMENT OF MINORS

"Neglect" means failure by a person responsible for a child's care to supply a child with necessary food, clothing, shelter or medical care when reasonably able to do so, or failure to protect a child from conditions or actions which imminently and seriously endanger the child's physical or mental health when reasonably able to do so, or failure to take steps to ensure that a child is educated in accordance with state law. ...This section does not impose upon persons, not otherwise legally responsible for providing a child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care, a duty to provide that care.

Minn. Stat. 626.556 Subd. 2(c)

EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT AND HABITUAL TRUANCY

Presumptions Regarding Truancy or Educational Neglect

A child's absence from school is presumed to be due to the parent's, guardian's, or custodian's failure to comply with compulsory instruction laws if the child is under 12 years old and the school has made appropriate efforts to resolve the child's attendance problems; this presumption may be rebutted based on a showing by clear and convincing evidence that the child is habitually truant. A child's absence from school without lawful excuse, when the child is 12 years old or older, is presumed to be due to the child's intent to be absent from school; this presumption may be rebutted based on a showing by clear and convincing evidence that the child's absence is due to the failure of the child's parent, guardian, or custodian to comply with compulsory instruction laws, sections 120.101 and 120.102.

Minn. Stat. 260.155 Subd. 9
Definition of Habitual Truant

"Habitual truant" means a child under the age of 16 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for seven school days if the child is in elementary school or for one or more class periods on seven school days if the child is in middle school, junior high school, or high school.

Minn. Stat. 260.015 Subd 19
APPENDIX 3
### FIGURE 1
AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE FOR
MINNEAPOLIS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washburn</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unweighted Average 88.7% 86.4% 87.4% 86.6% 85.6%

Source: Minneapolis Public Schools

### FIGURE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TRUANCY/DROPPING OUT
AND OTHER AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>% Correlation</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>% Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Use</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Depression/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco Use</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit Drug Use</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Anti-Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Safety</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th - 12th Grade Youth
FIGURE 3
ETHNIC BACKGROUND FOR MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS GENERAL ENROLLMENT AND TRUANCY CITATIONS FOR 1991-92 SCHOOL YEAR

K-12 Student Enrollment
- American Indian: 8%
- African-American: 34%
- Asian: 11%
- Chicano/Latino: 2%

Truancy Citations
- American Indian: 2%
- White: 19%
- Chicano/Latino: 3%
- Asian: 32%

Sources: Minneapolis Public Schools and Children of Color: A Wake-up Call to the Community

FIGURE 4
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUANCY CITATIONS FOR MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR 1991-92 SCHOOL YEAR AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Source: Minneapolis Public Schools
FIGURE 5
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUANT ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AND PREVIOUS NON-TRUANT CONTACT WITH SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES, 1988-89 SCHOOL YEAR

Source: Hennepin County Attorney's Office, 1992

FIGURE 6
STUDENT ATTENDANCE RATES FOR THE MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 1991-92

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Average Attendance Rate for Students Who Did Not Drop Out</th>
<th>Average Attendance Rate for Drop Outs</th>
<th>Difference in the Number of Days Missed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Student Support Services and Student Information Services, Minneapolis Public Schools
APPENDIX 4
FIGURE 1
SCHOOL PROCEDURES TO DEAL WITH EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT
FOR CHILDREN AGES 11 AND UNDER

Student has 3 full days of unexcused absences

District letter regarding truancy is sent to parent by school principal

School interventions planned and initiated to ameliorate student's truancy

Student continues to be truant

After 7, but no more than 10 unexcused absences, school social worker sends a written request to school attorney to send parents attorney's warning letter

School attorney sends warning letter to parents (copy to school)

School must wait 5 days after mailing of attorney's letter

Student continues to be truant

After 14, but before 16, unexcused absences, school social worker completes elementary school referral form and MPS form A. Gives to the principal

Principal verifies the Truancy Referral form and signs the MPS form A. If child is over the age of 10

Principal gives forms to school-liaison police officer who files citation with the violations bureau

Under 10
Referral is sent to Child Protection for assessment

Child continues to be truant

After 30 days of unsatisfactory progress, school may file a CHIPS petition

Source: Minneapolis Public Schools, Special Education Department
FIGURE 2
SCHOOL PROCEDURES TO DEAL WITH TRUANCY
FOR AGES 12 AND UNDER

Student is truant for 3 full days or has missed
one or more class periods for 3 days

District letter regarding truancy is sent to parent
by school principal

Student continues to be truant

After 7, but no more than 10 unexcused
absences, school social worker sends a written
request to school attorney to send parents
attorney's warning letter

School attorney sends warning letter to parents
(copy to school)

School must wait 5 days after mailing of
attorney's letter

Student continues to be truant

After 14, but before 16, unexcused absences,
school social worker completes school Truancy
Referral form (Juv 1-Truancy Form) and MPS
form A. On the 15th day of truancy the form is
given to the principal

Principal verifies the Truancy Referral form and
signs the MPS form A. The principal gives both
forms to the school-liaison police officer

School-liaison police officer files citation with
the violations bureau

Truancy Ends

Source: Minneapolis Public Schools, Special Education Department

Appendix 4 - 2
APPENDIX 5
Program: Truancy Abatement Burglary Suppression (TABS)
Began February 1981
San Jose, California
Serves Grades 7 - 12

Participants: San Jose Schools
San Jose Police
Juvenile Probation

Goal: To reduce the number of daytime burglaries and to reduce the number of truant children.

Methods:
1) Police officers have the legal authority to pick-up juveniles, who are truant, and transport them to a TABS Center.
2) Upon arrival at the center, juvenile probation completes a check to determine if there is a warrant out for the juvenile's arrest or a school attendance clause in his probation. In the case of a warrant, the juvenile is arrested. If there is a court order regarding attendance, the juvenile is transported to school, returned to a parent, or placed in Juvenile Hall.
3) If the above checks are negative, the parent of the juvenile is called and asked to pick up the child and return him to school. This involves the parent and can facilitate interaction between the parent and the school.

Support Services:
1) Student Service Centers
These centers are staffed by a team consisting of a probation officer, a school counselor, a mental health or social service counselor, a law enforcement diversion or school resource officer, and clerical staff. The team works together, at the school, in an attempt to limit the juvenile's penetration into the justice system.

2) Programs for Dropouts
These programs help students at-risk of dropping out to develop and implement their own success objectives. These students are provided with individual curriculum to successfully complete the minimal high school requirements.

3) Raising School Attendance
This program attempts to raise the consciousness of both the pupil and the parent in understanding the value of consistent school attendance. It does so by finding new ways the child can fit into the system, such as a minimum-day schedule or special education classes to address learning difficulties.

Evaluation: The TABS Program deals with between 5800 and 6200 truants a year. It has been successful in reaching its goal of reducing daytime burglary. In the ten years the program has been in place, the daytime residential burglary rate has dropped 68 percent.
Program: TABS Enhancement
Began July 1992
San Jose, California
Serves Grades 1 - 6

Participants: San Jose Elementary Schools
San Jose Police
District Attorney's Office

Goal: This program recognizes that habitual truancy often begins very early in a child's career. Therefore, the goal is to reduce truancy through early intervention. This is done by eliminating patterns of excessive absences and establishing a pattern of regular attendance for a successful school career.

Methods: 1) Elementary school districts identify habitual truants and submit their names and school attendance records to the TABS coordinator.
2) The TABS coordinator contact the parents to inform them of the educational code and asks them to attend a meeting with him.
3) The meeting is conducted at the police department to stress the seriousness of truancy. The objectives of the meeting are to determine the reason for truancy and agree upon a solution to the problem; to identify families who are in crisis and refer them to the appropriate agencies; to inform the parents that the child's attendance will be monitored for the remainder of the school year; and to inform the parents of the law and consequences of non-compliance.
4) If the truancy problem continues, the District Attorney will interview the parents of the truants, and will send letters to prosecute in extreme circumstances.

Evaluation: The program has not yet been evaluated due to the short time it has been in existence.
Program: Truancy Habits Reduced, Increasing Valuable Education (THRIVE) Program
Began November 1989
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Participants: Oklahoma City School District
Oklahoma City Police
District Attorney’s Office
Juvenile Bureau Personnel
Department of Human Services
Youth Cornerstone

Goals: 1) To reduce the rate of truancy and juvenile crime during school hours.
2) To divert children with school related problems from the Juvenile Justice System.
3) To increase the average daily attendance rates.
4) To collect data related to truant youth.

Methods: 1) This program was modeled after the San Jose TABS Program. The schools sign a contract with the police to have truant youth picked up and transported to the THRIVE Center.
2) A week after the child’s contact with the THRIVE Center, a short-term follow-up information form is prepared and mailed to the parents and school.
3) The THRIVE team will assess the needs of the priority cases and, when appropriate, make referrals for services to the children and their families.
4) Two weeks after the child’s contact with THRIVE, the District Attorney’s Office sends a letter to the parents informing them of the law of compulsory education and the consequences for non-compliance.
5) Long-term follow-up is conducted for the priority cases to monitor school attendance and enrollment and the use of referral services.

Evaluation: The THRIVE Program has reduced the amount of time police officers have to spend on truancy pick-ups. They can be in and out of the center in 5 minutes.
Burglaries between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm have dropped one-third since the inception of the program.
The city dropout rate was down almost 50 percent. From 8 percent before the program started, to 3.3 percent in December of 1990.
The absenteeism rate dropped from over 10 percent a day in the 1986-87 school year to only 4 percent a day.
Program: The Truancy Program
Began in 1989-90 School Year
Cincinnati, Ohio

Participants: Hamilton County Juvenile Court
Cincinnati Public Schools

Goals:
1) The percentage of daily unexcused absences will decrease annually at each school.
2) The percentage of students who must reappear before Truancy Court after successful termination will annually decrease at each school.
3) The percentage of students referred to Truancy Court will decrease each year.

Methods:
1) Early Identification of Truants
   After a students has had two unexcused absences, a visiting teacher contacts the student, the parents, and the teacher to identify the problems behind the truancy and develop a plan to resolve them. If, after the meeting, the student has five more unexcused absences, a Truancy Complaint is filed against her in Family Court. If the child’s truancy is caused by a parent, the a Failure to Send Complaint is filed against the parent.
2) Court Hearings on School Sites
   If a complaint is filed, a formal truancy hearing will be held on the school site. The main focus of the hearing is on the identification of the source of the problem and development of a plan to resolve it. Additional hearings will be scheduled to monitor the implementation of the plan.
3) School and Community Resources
   Each school will be responsible for establishing a School Advisory Committee to assist with the development of the Truancy Program. The Committee will work with the community to develop other innovative ways to effectively deal with truancy issues.

Evaluation:
The practice of holding Truancy Hearings at the school sites has been successful in that it has increased staff participation in the hearings. However, the program is not very successful with older truants. The belief is that the program should focus on an elementary school children. In doing so, the necessary services could be provided to children and families before the children begin a pattern of habitual truancy.
Program: Truancy Conference Officer  
Began in 1981  
Coshocton County, Ohio  
Serves Grades 1 - 12

Participants: Coshocton County Juvenile Court  
Coshocton County Schools

Goals: The primary purpose is early intervention to avoid the loss of school credit and court appearances of truancy charges.

Methods: 1) After a student has had five days of unexcused absences, a note is sent to his parents and the Truancy Conference Officer. This note alerts the parents of the student’s unexcused absences and informs them of the Ohio statutes pertaining to school attendance.

2) If a student accumulates an additional five unexcused absences, the Truancy Conference Officer is notified. He contacts the parents, the student, and the school to schedule an informal conference, within three days of the notification, at the school. The primary purpose of the conference is to determine what is causing the attendance problem and resolve the issue(s) to avoid court action against the student or the parents.

3) Following the meeting, if a student misses another five days, a complaint of Unruly Behavior is filed against the student or a Failure to Send Complaint is filed against the parent.

Evaluation: At the end of 1982, approximately 200 first notices were sent to parents: 25 second notices; 20 informal conferences held; which resulted in 7 cases coming to court.

This past year, the Truancy Conference Officer held 45 truancy interventions with only 5 of those coming to court.

The attendance rate for Coshocton County is over 96 percent.

The county has proposed to reduce the number of days from 5, 10, and 15 to 4, 6, and 8, because of the belief that working very quickly is the only way to effectively manage truant behavior.

As with The Truancy Program, the county believes that the focus should be on elementary-age children to prevent habitual truancy in adolescents.
Program: Project Early Start-- Absentee Prevention Program (APP)
Began 1980
Beaver County, Pennsylvania
Serves children in Elementary and Middle Schools

Participants:
Pennsylvania Health Department
County Commissioners
Children and Youth Services
Catholic Diocese
Child Health Association
Big Beaver Falls Area School District
NAACP
Parent-Teacher Organizations
Lion's Club
Other community organizations and concerned citizens

Goal:
To reduce the risk factors associated with chronic absenteeism and tardiness at the elementary and middle school level, as well as to address behavioral indicators of potential absenteeism.

Methods:
1) A school team, coordinated by an APP coordinator, identifies chronic absentees.
2) The needs of the child and the family are assessed by a prevention specialist and a team of school personnel. At this time, the team develops a relationship with the parent through phone calls, home visits, and school conferences.
3) An appropriate course of action and intervention is planned with the child, family, and school personnel.

This program recognizes that truancy is often a symptom of other problems in the child’s life. It uses an interagency approach to address such problems as family problems, social and emotional problems, academic frustration or school refusal, and parental drug and/or alcohol abuse.

Evaluations:
The program was begun as a pilot project in the Big Beaver Falls School District. Data collected over a three year period showed statistically significant evidence of improved attendance. It also revealed that 60 percent of the students referred for chronic absenteeism had parents abusing alcohol or other drugs.
Due to the success of the program, it is currently being replicated in 12 Pennsylvania school districts, 4 New Jersey schools, and in 9 counties in Michigan.
A study of five Pennsylvania replication sites by Villanova University found that APP was an effective program for identifying, intervening, and referring at-risk children. It also found that the program decreases absence from school.