

Truancy & Chronic Absence: Promoting School Success



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Truancy & Chronic Absence: The Scope of the Problem

- ❑ Chronic Truancy: unexcused absence (no universal definition exists)
 - Compulsory age students

- ❑ Chronic Absence
 - Missing about 10% of the school year

- ❑ Affects All Grades

- ❑ Common Causes:
 - Personal Issues
 - Familial Issues
 - School Issues

Truancy & Chronic Absence: Consequences

- ❑ A Leading Predictor of School Success
- ❑ A Leading Predictor of School Drop-out
- ❑ Leads to Loss of Student Attachment to School
- ❑ Strong Predictor of Future Delinquent Behavior & Other Problem Behaviors
- ❑ Poverty in Adulthood

Truancy & Chronic Absence: Appropriate Response:

- ❑ Truancy as a Behavior: requires consistent actions
- ❑ Truancy as a Symptom: requires individualized response
- ❑ Don'ts
 - ❑ Suspend for truancy
 - ❑ Fail a student because of truancy
 - ❑ Employ all punitive actions

Truancy & Chronic Absence: Appropriate Response:

- ❑ Truancy as a Community Problem: requires collaborative response
 - General community awareness & dialogue
 - Neighborhood business community engagement
 - Community-based supports
 - Police engagement for safety
 - Courts & child welfare engagement

- ❑ Best Practices from the Field:
 - Dedicated data-driven school staff and clear policy
 - Cross-systems early intervention
 - Intensive therapeutic models
 - Mediation
 - Youth Courts
 - Character & Youth Development

Truancy & Chronic Absence: Philadelphia's Response

- ❑ School-level Interventions
- ❑ Referral to Truancy Court and/or Child Welfare at 10 Unexcused
- ❑ Daytime Curfew & Compulsory Education Enforcement
- ❑ In-school Suspension & Truancy
- ❑ Cross-systems Data-Sharing
- ❑ Child Welfare Monitoring & Special Supports
- ❑ Citywide Analysis & Support – with Stoneleigh Foundation Policy Fellow, City of Philadelphia Policy & Analysis Center

Youth Courts:

An Effective Early Intervention

Students Helping Students Make Better Decisions

Fast Facts

- ❑ In 1994 there were 78 youth courts in the U.S. There are currently over 1,200.
- ❑ Last year over 100,000 cases were handled in youth courts and over 130,000 hours of volunteer service were provided.
- ❑ Nationally 9% of juvenile offenses are processed in youth courts.
- ❑ The average youth court case costs less than \$500 to process.
- ❑ Pennsylvania only has 15 youth courts and Illinois has over 150.
- ❑ There is no cookie cutter model for youth courts, each community can adapt the concept to local needs and realities.

Youth Courts:

An Effective Early Intervention

- ❑ What are Youth Courts
- ❑ Why Use Youth Courts
- ❑ Benefits for Respondents (Offenders)
- ❑ Benefits for Youth Court Members
- ❑ Education, Juvenile Justice and Community Benefits

Youth Development: A Best Practice Approach to Dropout Prevention

What MRI research on the brain can tell us about growing up SUCCESSFULLY...

Youth Development

Problems we all face:

- ❑ Conquering distractions
- ❑ Dealing with information overload
- ❑ Keeping emotions in check
- ❑ Maintaining and repairing relationships
- ❑ Managing time
- ❑ Managing stress
- ❑ Managing ourselves

Youth Development

We handle our problems by using our “Executive Function”

- What?
 - A set of brain-based functions for personal process management

- Where?
 - Behind the forehead in the prefrontal cortex

- What does it do?
 - Directs processes such as setting goals, making plans, monitoring behavior and inhibiting inappropriate behavior

Youth Development

Do Adolescents have a potential Executive Function?

- Answer: Yes – but the timetable for its full development varies
- Some individuals mature early
- For others, Executive Function capacity may not “be ready for use” until they are 20 – 25 years of age

Youth Development

The Problem of Stress:

- ❑ Worry, anxiety and stress cause a rise in brain wave frequency. (into the Beta 15-38 hz. range)
- ❑ When emotions “take over,” they overwhelm the capacity for rational thinking found in the brain’s neocortex. (into the Beta 12-15 hz. range)
- ❑ The result: we think that we are thinking, but we are being driven by an emotional autopilot.

Youth Development

How to Handle Stress

- The brain is meant to operate in a healthy, whole manner – like a jazz quartette.

- For stress overload:
 - Learn and practice relaxation strategies to restore the brain's balance.

 - Develop a problem-solving mindset with clear strategies for intentional decision making.

Youth Development

Truancy and Absenteeism:
“The Message” being sent

- ❑ Attending school is “TOO MUCH” to handle for some students, leading to a high level of stress in their lives.

- ❑ Possible causes:
 - Personal: inadequate self-management skills resulting in problem-overload and impaired decision making.
 - Familial: conflict, lack of emotional support.
 - School: lack of commitment to “learn.”
lack of attention capacity so learning can take place.

Youth Development

Learning is a Choice

- Academically successful students demonstrate specific goal-oriented behaviors:
 - Don't procrastinate
 - Finish what they start.
 - Set long-range goals.
 - Are aware of what is going on.
 - Set short-range goals.
 - Organize what they do (make a plan).

(K. Atman, 2009)

Youth Development

Implications of Brain-based Learning for Truant Youth

Two Premises:

- ❑ All youth have the potential of an Executive Function that can work well.
- ❑ Maturing youth whose Executive Function capacity is slow to develop will benefit from carefully structured academically-oriented self-planning and self-monitoring activities.

Youth Development

The Youth Court as an Agent for Behavior Change

- For Respondents:
 - Design the disposition process to focus on the respondent's Executive Function capacity for goal setting, planning and self-monitoring.
 - Support Executive Function capacity development as a goal of the disposition process.

Youth Development

The Youth Court as an Agent for Behavior Change

- For Jurors:
 - Encourage jurors to apply the rational thinking processes they use in the jury box in their academic classes
 - In this way, jurors can become role models for behavior change in the school.

Youth Development

Implications for Dropout Prevention

- Enhanced Executive Function capacity promotes:
 - Improved academic achievement (Washington School District, Washington County, Pennsylvania)
 - Reduced absenteeism (Beaver County (PA) Prevention Project)
 - Success for respondents engaged in the disposition process (Study underway at the Chester Youth Court)
 - Self-regulation skills for potential drop-out casualties.

Thank You!
