

## Rhode Island Truancy Court

[http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/truancy/success\\_1.html](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/truancy/success_1.html)

- Started in 2000 as a pilot program – 1 high school and 1 middle school
- 1 magistrate and 1 court aide are sent to school for the hearing
- student is given option of participating in truancy program or having case go to trial
- students who fulfill all requirements by the end of the year have case dismissed
- each student has a court team that consists of guidance counselors, teachers, mental health treatment providers, the parents, and the truant officer
- during the court sessions the team reviews the students compliance; if the student has done well than they receive positive reinforcement; if not then there are consequences ranging from detention to out of home placement
- the court operates in 21 communities and 59 schools
- every year 60-80% of youth improve attendance, most also improve their grades

<http://www.courts.state.ri.us/truancycourt/default.htm>

- In Rhode Island the law states that all students must attend school till age 16
- The program is designed around the idea that truancy is often the first step in a life of criminal behavior. Truancy Court recognizes that school absence is not a discrete issue and that it usually arises from a complex combination of factors.
  - each student involved in the program is monitored weekly for compliance
  - the court is empowered to issue contempt citations to the parents if they fail to appear when ordered; the court is also empowered to level fines against parents for the same reason
  - students must do the following to be in compliance with the Truancy court, 1.) attend school every day, 2.) be on time, 3.) behave appropriately, 4.) complete all academic work that is assigned to them
  - court was started in 2000 after it was noted that between 90 and 94 percent of youth who appear in juvenile court in Rhode Island were there because of truancy (different newspaper articles quote different figures but all the figures are in the low 90% range)
  - This program is also known as the Stop Truancy Outreach Program (STOP)
  - STOP was implemented in 2002, it serves as an extension of the Truancy Court
  - STOP includes training on appropriate conflict resolution and discipline techniques for parents
  - Response times of the court have improved from 90 days to 7-10 days; this helps students take the consequences of school absence seriously
  - Before the project was students were often only able to appear in family court once or twice during the school year; this greatly reduced the ability of the Court to help the student because they were so far behind academically
  - Starting in 2002 truancy court entered into a contract with the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)

- Students are referred to CCRI on Saturday mornings – they work on ways to build self confidence and explore future career interests. They are paired with college students to advise and mentor them
- Gilbert Stuart school had the worst attendance rates of any public school in Providence before the project; Their attendance rate was 90% at the end of 2002 and it had risen 25% between 2001 and 2002

<http://www.ncjfcj.org/content/view/245/289>

- The truancy court has the power to revoke the driver's licenses of students who are chronically absent from school

#### Truancy prevention

[http://www.vera.org/section5/section5\\_4.asp](http://www.vera.org/section5/section5_4.asp)

#### Approaches to truancy prevention (PDF article)

#### Truancy Intervention Program (Ramsey County Minnesota)

- Program began in 1995, addressed truancy in ages 12-16
- Program now addresses ages 6-18
- There are three levels of investigation
- A student with 3 or more absences referred with parents to a family meeting which addresses the legal consequences of truancy
- If the above fails, students are referred to the School Attendance Review Team
- SART team draws up contract with student, (this may include referral to counseling or other social services)
- If the attendance does not improve after the SART meeting, kids are referred to juvenile court
- 2000-2001 school year 2,192 students were referred to an initial meeting, 668 of these students had SART hearings, and 309 were referred to juvenile court
- District estimated 82% of students referred improved attendance as a result of program

### Fulton County Truancy Prevention Program, Atlanta Georgia

- Founded in 1991 by Atlanta Bar Association – provides mentors to students chronically absent from school
- 1993 Atlanta law firm establishes Kids In Need of a Dream (KIND), supports truancy prevention by training mentors ( these mentors often double as the child’s attorney)
- If school is not able to help students with attendance a petition with the court is filed
- BEFORE the case is tried – a probation officer who works exclusively with truancy issues is assigned, and the child’s case is referred to KIND where an attorney is given the child’s case
- Prior to the case being tried the attorney meets with the family and tries to come up with an alternative plan
- AFTER the case is tried, the child remains under court supervision and is required to obey a contract involving attendance and the provision of other services
- The attorney stays involved with the child and their family and continues in a supervisory role
- Outside evaluation says that the TIP program has a 70% success rate of keeping kids at risk of dropping out in school.

### Seventeenth District Truancy Reduction Project (Adams County, Colorado)

- Schools are required to try internal measures such as counseling before they refer the case to juvenile court
- If internal measures fail then the school files a petition in juvenile court
- After the case is referred to the truancy case manager families are given the option of participating in the Truancy Reduction Project as an **alternative** to having their case tried in juvenile court
- If the family decides to enroll in the Truancy Reduction Project, the Truancy Case Manager designs a family treatment plan after talking with the school.
- This treatment plan is able to require both the child AND members of their family to meet certain conditions
- The Truancy Case Manager follows the family for 12 weeks
- If the family fails to meet conditions of the family treatment plan then the case is referred to the Magistrate Judge. This judge can sentence parents to jail for contempt of court.
- Approximately 85% of children and their families complete the program.
- Program received a Judicial Conference Award for it’s success working with a difficult population