



OJJDP

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Truancy Reduction: Keeping Youth in School and Out of Trouble

Truancy has long been identified as an early warning sign of potential delinquent behavior, social isolation, and educational failure. Several studies have concluded that lack of commitment to school is a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out. The effects of truancy are pervasive—the problem takes its toll not only on students, but also on schools and communities.

In 1998, OJJDP, the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Weed and Seed, and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Office initiated the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program. The goal of the program is to encourage communities to develop comprehensive approaches to identifying and tracking truant youth and reducing truancy.

The Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program has been implemented in seven sites: Contra Costa County, CA; Jacksonville, FL; Honolulu, HI; Yaphank, NY; Houston, TX; Seattle, WA; and Tacoma, WA. The sites vary in size—serving anywhere from 30 to 1,500 youth—and are diverse in geographic location, ethnic and sociodemographic makeup, and community-based leadership. The program has served more than 2,000 youth and more than 1,100 families.

A key concept in this initiative is collaboration among community members, which is important because it produces a shared vision, maximizes existing resources, and results in a blend of services to address the range of issues related to truancy. Programs are overseen at the community level by a multiagency group. Participation in this collaborative by schools, law enforcement, and courts is essential for success in reducing truancy. Collaborative participants are also drawn from social services agencies, health organizations, probation, businesses, and faith-based organizations. An evaluation of the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (see below) has found that stability of the oversight collaborative is critical to success. Involvement of parents in all truancy reduction activities is also crucial.

Communities participating in this initiative are implementing a variety of programs that link truant youth with community-based services and programs. Examples of activities include community truancy boards, truancy workshops, and community awareness campaigns. Truancy case managers usually work directly with youth and families, making home visits, monitoring school attendance, providing tutoring, and

J. Robert Flores
OJJDP Administrator

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referring youth and families to community agencies as needed.

OJJDP is funding an evaluation of the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program, conducted by the National Center for School Engagement at the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children in Denver, CO (see sidebar below). All seven sites have participated in the evaluation. Speaking at the November 2003 meeting of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (see article on page 3), Ken Seeley, President and Chief Executive Officer, Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, highlighted findings from the evaluation and noted several components of promising truancy reduction efforts (see sidebar to right). Mr. Seeley observed that there is no "silver bullet." Truancy programs must be locally designed and based on community needs and best practices. Truancy reduction should not be the responsibility of one agency—solutions require a wide range of participants from many disciplines.

Expanding its truancy reduction efforts, OJJDP recently awarded a grant to the National Truancy Prevention Association to provide training and technical assistance to communities implementing truancy reduction programs (see Funding Update, page 5). The Association assists communities in developing and sustaining effective truancy prevention practices, promoting a collaborative approach to help increase school attendance, combat truancy, and improve the lives of children and families.

For more information about the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program, including evaluation results, visit www.truancyreduction.org. A recent OJJDP videoconference on truancy reduction efforts can be viewed at www.trc.eku.edu/jj/archive.html. Additional information about truancy is available on the OJJDP Web site (go to www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp, click on "Topics," and select "Schools/truancy.") ■

Components of Promising Truancy Reduction Efforts

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

National Center for School Engagement

The mission of the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), a program of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, is to promote school engagement and truancy prevention to ensure success in school. NCSE's goals are to identify the essential elements of truancy model programs in schools, courts, and communities; to determine how community collaboration affects truancy reduction interventions; and to demonstrate outcomes of truancy interventions. Established in 1999 and supported by OJJDP, the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Weed and Seed, and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Office, NCSE provides research-based information and identifies best practices for addressing truancy.

For the last 4 years, NCSE has been conducting a process evaluation of the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program that has now shifted to an outcome evaluation to determine program results at the seven demonstration sites. NCSE has created an online data collection system to track the demographics, needs, service referrals, juvenile justice involvement, and disciplinary incidents of truant students in the demonstration sites. Student outcomes are evaluated according to measures of school attendance, attachment, and achievement.



NCSE | National Center for School Engagement
Promoting Truancy Prevention & School Success

For more information, visit
www.truancyreduction.org.

New Publications

Publications may be viewed on and downloaded from OJJDP's Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp). Print publications may also be ordered from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (800-851-3420 or online at puborder.ncjrs.org).

How Families and Communities Influence Youth Victimization. Examines how individual, family, and community factors influence the risk for nonlethal violence among U.S. youth ages 12-17.

Bulletin, November 2003. NCJ 201629.

Explanations for the Decline in Child Sexual Abuse Cases. Discusses the decline in the number of sexual abuse cases, as substantiated by child protective services agencies, between 1992 and 2000.

Crimes Against Children Bulletin, January 2004. NCJ 199298

Juvenile Suicides, 1981-1998. Analyzes statistical trends in suicides by juveniles.

Youth Violence Research Bulletin, March 2004. NCJ 196978

News From the Coordinating Council

The Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention brings together representatives from youth-serving federal agencies and youth-focused disciplines to coordinate federal programs related to delinquency prevention, missing and exploited children, and the detention/care of unaccompanied juveniles.

At the Council's November 2003 meeting, several presentations focused on truancy reduction:

- William Hodges and Shelly Grant of the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida described Duval County's Truancy Arbitration Program, which holds parents accountable for their children's school attendance.
- Susan Block, Administrative Judge, County Circuit Court, District 16, St. Louis, MO, described a truancy court diversionary program in which a proactive partnership of schools, families, and courts uses positive reinforcement to help newly truant youth improve their school attendance.
- John Tyson, Jr., District Attorney, Mobile County, AL, presented information on the Make the Right

Choice Program, a community juvenile crime prevention effort with an "early warning" truancy reduction component.

- Ken Seeley of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children highlighted findings from the National Center for School Engagement's evaluation of the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (see article on page 1).

In addition, Don Franks of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports described the President's Active Lifestyle Award and Presidential Champions programs, which encourage physical activity. Mr. Franks remarked that although physical activity is not a panacea for social ills, it can offer positive alternatives and can be used to supplement other programs.

Council meetings are held quarterly in Washington, DC, and are open to the public. At the next meeting, the Council will again focus on truancy issues, including those in American Indian communities. For additional information, visit the Council's Web page at ojjdp.ncjrs.org/council/index.html. ■



OJJDP Videoconference Addresses Prostitution of Children

Promising strategies for combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) were the focus of a live satellite videoconference that aired on December 11, 2003, drawing participants at 190 downlinks and approximately 1,000 Internet sites nationwide. "Working Together To Stop the Prostitution of Children" was sponsored by OJJDP in association with the Juvenile Justice Telecommunications Assistance Project of Eastern Kentucky University.

OJJDP Administrator J. Robert Flores, characterizing CSEC as "underreported, underrecognized, and under-treated," opened the conference with an overview of the problem and OJJDP's initiatives to date. Joining Mr. Flores were four panelists with diverse perspectives:


- Detective Catherine de la Paz of the Dallas (TX) Police Department's Child Exploitation Squad explained that many girls who are victims of child prostitution go through the juvenile justice system as offenders rather than victims.
- Deborah Espy, Deputy District Attorney and Senior Manager of the Crimes Against Women and Children Unit, Fulton County, GA, discussed how a variety of statutes can be used to prosecute pimps who prey on juveniles.
- Beth Jacobs offered insights from her work as Program Coordinator for Breaking Free, a St. Paul, MN, organization that provides housing and mentoring services for prostituted girls, and from her life experience as a survivor of juvenile prostitution.

- Amy Durkin, Clinical Coordinator for YANA (You Are Never Alone) in Baltimore, MD, described her program's comprehensive approach to assisting girls involved in prostitution.

Three video segments illustrated promising approaches to implementing protection, prosecution, and prevention strategies:

- New York: Juvenile Crime Special Projects Squad. New York City. Police investigators talk with young girls on the street, build their self-esteem, gain their trust, and direct them to services. The relationships they cultivate have led to the successful prosecution of numerous pimps.
- Georgia: CEASE (Center to End Adolescent Sexual Exploitation), Atlanta. Among this advocacy organization's accomplishments is passage of state laws that make pimping and pandering of children a felony.
- California: SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation), San Francisco. This nonprofit organization operates a nonresidential trauma and recovery center for prostituted girls, where peer mentors help them work through their experiences.

To view "Working Together To Stop the Prostitution of Children" on the Web, visit juvenilenet.org/jjtap and click on "Archives." Videotapes of the conference are available for \$15 from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (call 800-851-3420). ■



Update Your Rolodex

The toll-free number for the
Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
 has changed to **800-851-3420**.

Funding Update

Be sure to check the OJJDP Web site (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp) for the latest news on OJJDP funding opportunities, including grant application information, deadlines, and links to the Office of Justice Programs' online Grants Management System (GMS). To receive e-mail notification of new funding opportunities, subscribe to JUVJUST via the OJJDP Web site.

Current Solicitations

OJJDP is soliciting applications for the following grant programs:

- The Drug-Free Communities Support Program will award approximately 180 new grants of up to \$100,000 each in fiscal year (FY) 2004. Community coalitions whose members have worked together on substance abuse reduction initiatives for at least 6 months and who meet all other requirements outlined in the program announcement are eligible to apply.
- OJJDP's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program will award six grants of up to \$300,000 each in FY 2004. This program supports regional task forces that address the use of online technology to victimize children. Because the program is targeting areas that do not yet have ICAC Task Forces, the solicitation is limited to Illinois, Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, West Virginia, and the Northern Virginia/Washington, DC, metro area (excluding Maryland).

Upcoming Solicitation

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative—jointly sponsored by OJJDP, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—anticipates funding new awards in FY 2004. This program supports the development of comprehensive, communitywide strategies for creating safe and drug-free schools and promoting healthy childhood development. Local educational agencies (LEAs) or consortia of LEAs are eligible to apply.

Recent Award

OJJDP recently awarded a \$1.1 million grant for the National Truancy Prevention Training and Technical Assistance Project. The project provides funding to the National Truancy Prevention Association to identify, define, and document existing truancy court diversion and dropout prevention approaches and develop training and technical assistance materials; provide training and technical assistance to truancy court test sites; and evaluate the effectiveness of truancy court programs at these sites. ■

OJJDP Participates in National Youth Summit

The second annual National Youth Summit, hosted by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth and Families, was held in Washington, DC, on November 6–8, 2003. The theme of the summit was "Building on the Strengths of America's Youth." Attendees—young people who are active in their communities; national, state, and local policymakers; community leaders and youth service providers; and experts in the field of Positive Youth Development—discussed effective practices in youth development and learned of contributions that youth are making to their communities.

OJJDP Administrator J. Robert Flores joined other members of a panel of public policy experts at the summit's youth town hall meeting. OJJDP also sponsored summit workshops on mentoring and youth courts. Among recipients of FYSB's summit attendance scholarships were youth and advisors recommended by OJJDP from grantee organizations in several of its programs that foster youth-adult partnerships and positive youth development. These programs include Tribal Youth Program, Title V Community Prevention Grants Program, Drug-Free Communities Support Program, and Youth Crime Watch of America.

A report on the first National Youth Summit, held in June 2002, appeared in the July/August 2002 issue of *OJJDP News @ a Glance*, available on the OJJDP Web site (go to www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp and click on "E-News"). ■

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News @ a Glance is OJJDP's bimonthly newsletter, bringing you up-to-date notices of agency activities, recent publications, funding opportunities, and upcoming events—with an emphasis on providing quick access to online sources for publications and other resources. Let us know what types of features would be most useful to you (e-mail askijj@ncjrs.org).

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