



Questions on truancy

1. Why is truancy a gateway to the juvenile justice system? What might truancy be symptom of? What is it a predictor of?

Kids can get into trouble when they are unsupervised.

Kids can get become court-involved for truancy in itself, even though we've stopped putting truants in detention.

Students who miss school fall behind and are more likely to have behavior problems when they do attend.

Poor academic performance is linked to involvement with the juvenile and adult systems.

2. Aprea, the young woman from Stamford, talked about overcrowding in her school. Her uncle talked about her bad relationships with teachers. What are some factors might make a kid want to – or not want to – go to school?

Aprea obviously enjoyed the encouragement, caring and personal attention she got from teachers in her alternative school. It's interesting to note that this connection-forming is something critical that costs a school district nothing, though teachers have told us that cutbacks and an emphasis on raising test scores leave them little time to connect with students. There was also strong communication between home and school.

Students may skip school because of:

Bullying

Academic frustration

Family responsibilities

Lack of appropriate clothing

Parental opinion that "school doesn't matter"

3. We heard that poor attendance starts as early as kindergarten, when parents obviously still control their children's schedules. What barriers might stop parents from sending their kids to school?

Kids may miss school because they don't have appropriate clothing, like a winter coat. Or they may be home taking care of siblings. Or they are sick a lot and don't have access to high quality or regular health care

Most people believe that doing well in school is the first step toward achieving many personal and professional goals. In some families, though, there may be no adults who have graduated from high school. So there's no example of education leading to a better future. How do we reach out to families like that?

4. Do you know what the truancy rate is like in your town and your school?

If the answer is no, you might ask for a volunteer to ask the school district and report back. Or the group can visit:

http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/WEB/ct_report/SnapshotSelect.aspx

Just look up your town, select students and student attendance.

5. How can we improve attendance?

Many schools find a "check and connect" strategy works, that is: a child knows that a specific adult cares about attendance and will be monitoring it. It can be someone inside or outside the school.

Hartford's Truancy Court Prevention Project has made a difference by linking middle schoolers to case management services.

In Bridgeport, Hartford and Stamford, schools refer kids with truancy problems to a Juvenile Review Board rather than court. Because JRBs are linked to community services, they can often get kids the help they need at little or no cost.