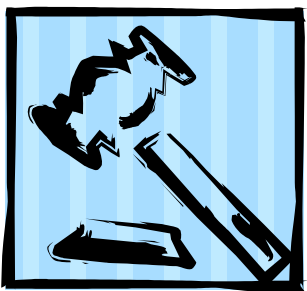


STATE OF DELAWARE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT



TRUANCY COURT ANNUAL REPORT School Year 2001-2002

Increased School Attendance, Improved Academic Performance, Interagency Collaboration, and the Empowerment of Families

What is the Truancy Court?

The Justice of the Peace Truancy Court continues to expand its involvement throughout the state. In 1996 the Court handled 100 cases and had one judge in one county. For the school year 2001-2002 five judges with supporting staff handled 737 cases encompassing 3456 court events (filings, arraignments and case reviews) statewide.

The current system includes:

- A designated Truancy Court in every county
- 1 Fulltime Truancy Coordinator for the state
- 5 judges specifically trained to work with truancy cases
- State prosecutor and visiting teachers in every county
- 1 grant funded Licensed Clinical Social Worker working full time in the New Castle Court
- Student Interns from Delaware State University
- Agency staff present in court to make immediate referrals
- Shared court support staff

Procedurally, the Truancy Court functions uniformly throughout the state with regard to case filing, arraignment, trial and case review (compliance hearing held every 30 days for a 6-9 month period on average). However, each case is handled on an individual basis and processes vary accordingly. Successful resolution of these

cases is closely tied to the continuing relationships between the families and the judge, as well as with the school, treatment providers and other available services.

How does the Truancy Court provide family intervention?

Truancy Court works with an array of services and agencies to provide a wraparound like service to our families. With the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Education, The Department of Services for Children, Youth and Families, and the Justice of the Peace Court, information is shared regarding truancy families allowing most services to be put into place in a matter of days.



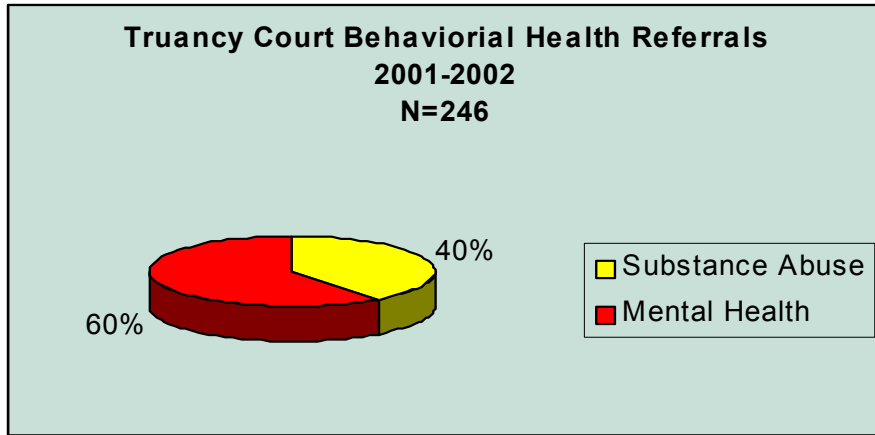
- A Sussex County mother shared, "Having two children in alternative school is difficult." After 12 months of being involved with Truancy court both students have returned to their regular school, have greatly improved attendance and will both be promoted to the next grade.

- As a result of Truancy Court, a Kent County mother who sent her recalcitrant teenage son away to live in another state to avoid truancy charges, brought him back and, with the assistance of the Truancy Court, her son has had perfect attendance and improved academic performance.
- A New Castle Truancy court student said to her mother one day "[Truancy Court] is the only place that I come to where they tell me that I am doing a good job."

Who are the Truancy Court Partners?

Interagency collaboration has been one of the major keys to the success of Truancy Court. Provider agencies are present in the court room to begin the process as soon as the agency referral is made by the court. This immediate contact with agencies – resulting in a family leaving the court with a scheduled appointment -- has been significant in engaging a family in treatment, parenting education, Children's Health Plan and state agencies, as needed. In

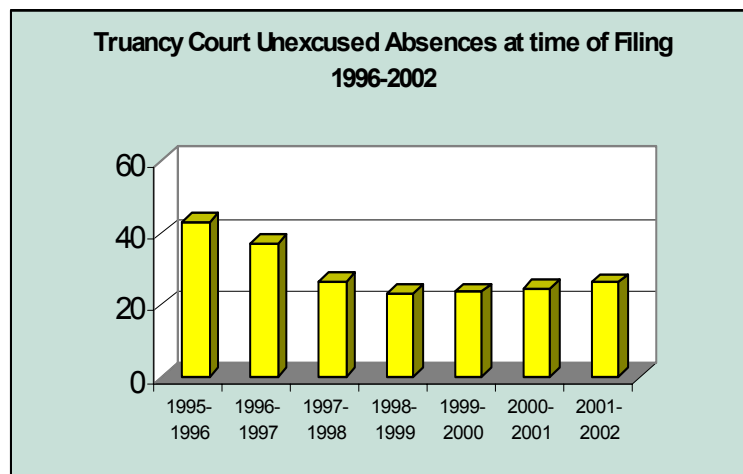
2001-2002, 246 Truancy Court cases resulted in a behavioral health (substance abuse or mental health) referral.



Beginning to Look at Outcome

Although there has been many anecdotal indicators of success, the Truancy Court finally has sufficient data to quantify its achievements during the 2001-2002 school year:

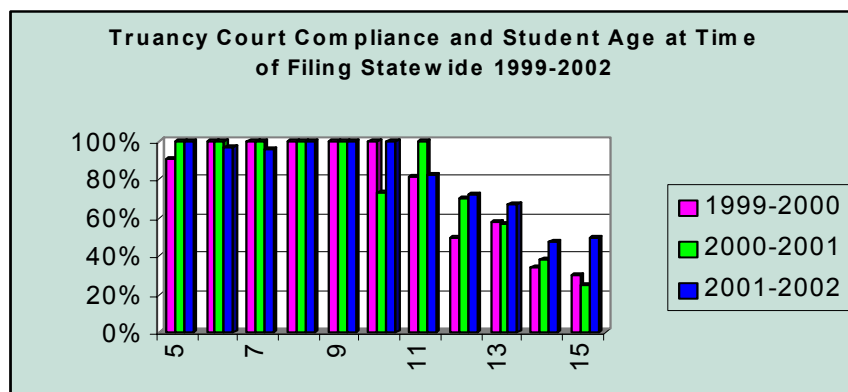
- **The average number of unexcused absences at the time of filing has decreased from 43.4 days in 1995-1996 to 26.3 days in 2001-2002, representing a 39.5% decrease.** This decrease evidences the hard work of school districts in charging truant students earlier, and enhances the likelihood of success in Truancy Court.



- Another indicator of performance is that the average age of the student at the time of filing for the 2001-2002 school year was 11.3 years old, representing a 5.8% decrease from the previous year's average of 12 years old.

Even more important in determining the long-term effect, and ultimately the success, of the Truancy Court is the availability of follow up information on all 2001-2002 truancy cases for the first time:

- **56% of the 341 cases closed in 2001-2002 achieved full compliance with the Truancy Court.** *This represents a significant improvement (27%) from the previous school year's compliance rate of 44%.*
- This compliance rate represents a meaningful achievement, given that Truancy Court often deals with students who have had long-term truancy problems before they appear in Court and are difficult to reach; they may be close to compulsory school attendance age of 16 years old and will age out before the Truancy Court process can work; the large number of the unexcused absences (exceeding 60 days) make reengagement for that school year almost impossible; or the students are already too involved in the criminal/delinquency system for them to realistically reengage in school.
- Preliminary statistics also demonstrate **the need to target younger truants to enhance success -- the compliance rate is close to 100% when the truant student is less than 11 years old.**

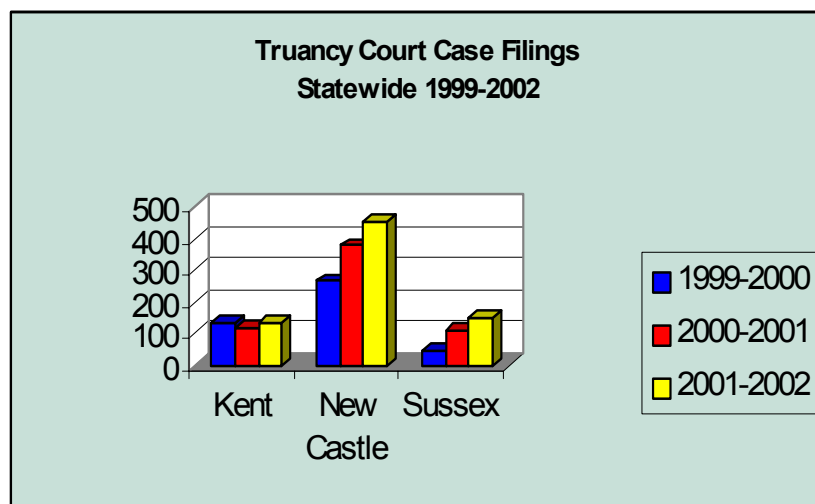


- **Early intervention by decreasing the unexcused absences at the time of filing also effects outcome.** 2001-2002 students who achieved full compliance with the Truancy Court had an average number of unexcused absences at the time of filing of 23 days. The average number of unexcused days for non-compliant students at the time of filing was 34 days. This difference demonstrates *the importance of charging truants sooner (when they have fewer absences) to enhance the likelihood that the student will reengage in the educational process.*

Does Truancy Court help students get back to school?

- Preliminarily, statistics on the long-term benefits of Truancy Court demonstrate good results in the truant students’ successful return to school: Based on a sample of 453 cases statewide, 70.8% of the students in Truancy Court completed the school year immediately following the closing of the truancy case. More importantly, **95% of the 181 students who achieved full compliance with Truancy Court in 2001-2002 completed the school year.** *These outstanding results clearly demonstrate that the Truancy Court WORKS!*

Truancy Court activity case filings comparison:



- School districts filing cases in Truancy Court include:

NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2000-2001	2001-2002
Appoquinimink	9	15
Brandywine	51	48
Christina	202	234
Colonial	54	59
Red Clay	61	96
TOTAL	377	452
KENT COUNTY	2000-2001	2001-2002
*Because We Care	14	23
Capital	27	32
Caesar Rodney	21	42
Lake Forest	21	17
Smyrna	14	22
TOTAL	121	136
SUSSEX COUNTY	2000-2001	2001-2002
Cape Henlopen	7	24
Delmar	20	26
Indian River	32	24
Laurel	4	36
Milford	12	25
Seaford	11	9
Woodbridge	7	5
TOTAL	112	149
GRAND TOTAL	610	737
*Alternative School (multi-district)		

Initiatives 2001-2002

- The Truancy Task Force was reconvened to propose new legislation promoting truancy prevention efforts. The two new legislative initiatives implemented as a result provide for the simultaneous charging of both parents and teenagers in Truancy Court (thereby accelerating the process), the use of Probation Before Judgment in truancy cases (promoting the rehabilitative, rather than punitive, nature of Truancy Court), and the earlier reporting of truant students to Visiting Teachers.
- A grant funded program began in Kent County in partnership with the Boy's and Girl's Club to work with older, chronically truant students.

- Truancy Court continued its efforts to enhance consistency of policies and procedures for filing and management of truancy cases statewide.
- A second day per month was added in both Kent and Sussex Counties, due to caseload increases.
- Truancy Court promoted its relationships with school districts statewide to gain access to school-related follow up information on truancy cases.
- Delaware State University social work students provided services to the Truancy Court through yearlong internships with the Court.

What's next for Truancy Court 2002-2003?

- Delaware's Truancy Court has been invited to make presentations at the Annual Conference for the International Association of Pupil Personnel Workers in Fall of 2002. As the only statewide Truancy Court program, Delaware provides a model other truancy professionals are interested in understanding.
- Continuation and, hopefully, expansion of the Boy's and Girl's Club program for chronically truant youth in Kent County to Sussex and New Castle Counties.
- Expansion of the Truancy Court relationship with Delaware State University, other institutions of higher learning, and additional community-based agencies.
- Additional resources to assist the Justice of the Peace Court in managing the Truancy Court process.

How do we get "there" from "here"?

All those involved with the Truancy Court initiative can be proud of its achievements so far. But, there is much more that can be done to promote truancy prevention. **A key focus must be on encouraging school districts to refer cases earlier (with less than 20 days of unexcused absence) and when students are younger (before 12 years of age) to enhance the effectiveness of Truancy Court.**

*State of Delaware
Justice of the Peace Court
Truancy Court Report
August 2002*

*For further information contact
Janet Urdahl, Truancy Coordinator
302-739-1293*