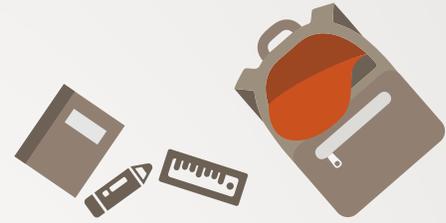


## THE PROBLEM



### TRUANCY AND ITS IMPACTS



Each year, **millions of students**—disproportionately students of color and those from low-income families—are chronically absent from school nationwide.



**Truancy (unexcused absences)** is of particular concern. Research has shown that failure to address chronic truancy can result in severe consequences for childhood and adult outcomes, as well as for families and communities.



**Truancy has been linked to:**

- poor academic performance and school dropout
- drug and alcohol use
- poorer health outcomes
- lower paying jobs
- fighting, theft, and more serious delinquency
- a greater chance of incarceration within lifetime

### COMPLEX ROOT CAUSES

#### School-Specific

- School climate issues
- Inconsistent attendance policies
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Inflexible teaching styles
- Inappropriate academic rigor
- Unengaging curriculum
- Fear of being bullied
- Teacher absenteeism

#### Student-Specific

- Mental health or substance use problems
- Poor self-esteem
- Learning disabilities
- Low reading and math levels
- Lack of positive peer relationships
- Language barriers
- Physical health

As the impacts of truancy extend beyond just the student, so do the causes.

Truancy is a complex behavior resulting from interacting student, school, family, and community-level factors.

#### Family-Specific

- Parental substance abuse
- Child abuse/neglect
- Lack of guidance or supervision
- Domestic violence
- Poverty
- Lack of knowledge about truancy
- Child stays home to care for family member

#### Community-Specific

- Peer influence
- Lack of support for school
- Lack of responsive community services
- Community upheaval and social change
- High incidence of substance abuse
- Crime or gang activity
- Inadequate transportation

### COMMON RESPONSES

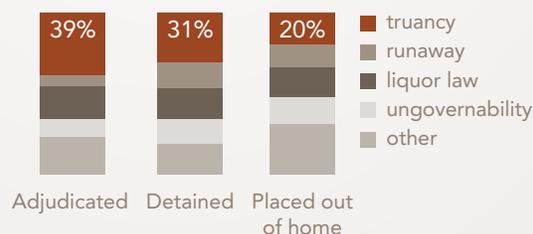


Parents, schools, and courts are working to find effective responses to truancy. However, many local policies remain largely punitive.

In 2013, truancy cases constituted **over half of the 109,000 status offense cases filed** nationwide.



Truancy cases resulted in more adjudications, detentions, and out-of-home placements than any other type of status offense court case:



Pushing students toward court and system involvement exacerbates the very factors underlying truancy.



## WHAT WORKS



### PROMISING PRACTICES

**1** Ensure a positive school climate, flexible teaching approaches, and supportive services to encourage school attendance and engagement

Many students will not go to school to avoid unsafe, uncomfortable, or embarrassing situations—such as bullying or a lack of winter attire. A supportive school environment fosters student engagement, learning, and development.

**2** Closely monitor absenteeism and student behavior to enable early detection and intervention

Early warning systems that use clearly defined and up-to-date student attendance and performance data allow educators to swiftly identify and react appropriately to early patterns of absenteeism.

**3** Involve families, school staff and teachers, community service providers, and other key stakeholders in service planning and monitoring

Multidisciplinary teams pool and capitalize on stakeholder resources and expertise. Family engagement helps ensure parental buy-in and provides important insight into the child's life, truancy issues, and experiences within the community.

**4** Develop tiered school- and community-based responses that prioritize comprehensive supportive services and reduce punishments

Successful programs provide comprehensive school- and community-based supports that intensify according to the closely monitored needs of truant youth and their families.

### JURISDICTIONS WITH WORKING STRATEGIES

**Rapides Parish, LA** reduced the number of school-initiated FINS (Families in Need of Services) referrals using a **school exhaustion form** that requires school officials to document a series of in-school intervention efforts that were made before turning to the court to address truancy.



**Maricopa County, AZ** reduced court involvement among truant youth through **school attendance conferences**—where school and probation staff work together with youth and families to identify the causes of attendance problems and connect youth to extensive school-based services.

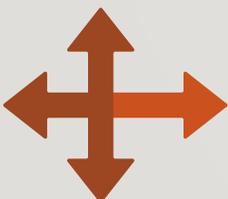


**Clark County, WA's** Truancy Project also reduced court involvement among truant youth through **workshops** that inform youth about the consequences of truancy, as well as a mix of **individual supervision and group activities** that aim to identify student-specific barriers to school attendance and help students better engage in the community.



More information on these and other promising models available at [statusoffensereform.org](http://statusoffensereform.org)

### MOVE YOUR JURISDICTION IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



The Status Offense Reform Center (SORC) provides policymakers and practitioners with tools and information to create effective, community-based responses for keeping young people who engage in noncriminal behavior out of the juvenile justice system.

For research on truancy and other status offenses, visit us at [statusoffensereform.org](http://statusoffensereform.org).

**STATUS OFFENSE** | REFORM CENTER