

**Policy Statement on  
Truancy, Expulsion,  
and Children Out of School**



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# Truancy, Expulsion, and Children Out of School

## Policy Statement

The President's Commission on Model State Drug Laws supports the premise that alcohol and other drug prevention strategies must address risk factors and their underlying causes. One risk factor in particular — truancy — creates an unnecessary barrier to the development and maintenance of drug-free communities and schools.

Truancy and dropping out of school have been correlated with alcohol and other drug abuse by youths. According to the U.S. Department of Education:

“High school seniors who are heavy drug users are more than three times as likely to skip school as nonusers. About one-fifth of heavy users skipped three or more school days a month, more than six times the truancy rate of nonusers. In a Philadelphia study, dropouts were almost twice as likely to be frequent drug users as were high school graduates; four in five dropouts used drugs regularly.” (U.S. Department of Education, *What Works: Schools Without Drugs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1992), p. 11.)

If schools intervene immediately with the problem of truancy, there is a higher probability of preventing the potential onset of criminality and alcohol and other drug problems, of developing healthy students and citizens, or assessing and treating problems. But others outside of the educational system can intervene on the student's behalf as well. Prevention and intervention specialists, treatment, health care, and social service providers, community members, and law enforcement personnel all can be key participants in the effort to reduce student truancy and its attendant problems. An effective response to truancy, then, should be planned by a consortium representative of each of these participants. The Commission recommends that state [Secretaries of Education] convene this broad-based consortium to develop strategies and recommendations that may be implemented at the local level to address student truancy.

The Commission also offers the following recommendations for consideration by such broad-based consortia in the development of local truancy strategies:

(a) Prevention.

- (1) Offer positive activities to encourage students to attend and succeed within the school environment. Examples of these would include citizenship, attendance, or academic excellence awards.

(2) Develop innovative community incentive opportunities in which strong collaboration is developed between families, schools, businesses, and other citizens.

(3) Offer evening, tuition-free parent/student classes for high risk students and their parents.

(b) School-level interventions.

(1) Develop alternative education programs for children who are not succeeding in traditional school settings. Such programs should support the idea that every child can learn and provide every child with an opportunity to receive an appropriate education.

(2) Develop legislation that allows principals to issue [\$10] citations to students or parents for truancy and to use other innovative approaches to address this problem.

(3) Fully explore and attempt all options before chronically truant children are removed from school. Develop alternatives to suspension and expulsion, such as the institution of increasing levels of intervention and supervision with parental consent. These escalating levels of intervention and supervision might limit the child's discretionary time and provide an increasing degree of structure rather than removing students from schools and banishing them to likely unsupervised environments. As an example of such increasing levels:

(A) An 8 hour school day would be imposed for initial infractions;

(B) A more structured 12 hour school day would be imposed if the problem worsens;

(C) A more highly structured 16 hour day would be imposed where the problem continues; and

(D) If necessary, a secure 24 hour residential school.

Such increasing levels of intervention and supervision also should be applied to other school infractions, in lieu of suspension or expulsion where appropriate.

The Commission anticipates higher state and local education expenditures to develop and implement such increasing levels of intervention and supervision. However, the Commission believes that the long term costs to society if truancy is not addressed will outweigh the increased initial education costs. The impact of truant or expelled youths who become criminally-involved can be enormous. Not only are these costs incurred by the police, prosecution, courts, and victims of crime, there are also the personal losses incurred by the truant or expelled individual. The Commission urges policymakers to conduct cost-offset studies that examine the impact of a significant reduction in truancy and expulsions on criminal justice and societal costs and on the increased benefits of encouraging youths towards more productive lifestyles.

(c) Networked interventions. Establish through legislation authority for peace officers to intervene with young people who are not in school during school hours. This authority should allow officers to detain a child who is not in school during school hours and deliver him or her to a designated location, either the school or a non-secure intake center. Schools may be contacted to verify enrollment and attendance patterns. Parents should be contacted and required to come to that location to release their child and return him or her to school. Where parental

involvement with their children is so attenuated that such parental activity is unlikely, follow-up intervention should be required by local social service authorities.

Follow-up contacts may be made to assist with communication between parents, child, and school and provide referral options. An example of this type of program is the THRIVE Program, operating out of the Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office.

(d) Addressing chronically absent or truant students and their parents. Mandate a specific procedure for addressing chronically absent or truant students and their parents as soon as the pattern of absence from school becomes evident. This procedure could include the following steps:

(1) The school contacts parent(s), verifies reason for absence, and attempts to get the child back to the school site.

(2) A representative of the District Attorney's office or other law enforcement agencies holds a meeting with parents of all chronically absent students at the school site and advises both the child and parent(s) of possible legal action if truancy continues. If truancy does continue, the student will then be referred to a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB).

(3) SARBs diagnose and recommend procedures to alleviate the circumstances that are contributing to the truancy, attendance, and behavior problems of a student. SARBs are designed to explore alternatives to adjudication by the juvenile justice system.

(A) A SARB, comprised of a teacher or counselor, an attendance officer, a school administrator, the District Attorney or other local law enforcement officials, a medical practitioner, and a probation officer, reviews the absences and excuses with the child and parent(s) and enters into a contract with them to eliminate future truancy.

(B) Upon the child's first unexcused absence following the SARB conference, a meeting is held to inform parents and child of court action to be taken against parent(s) and/or child if absentee problem continues.

(4) Explore legal remedies for inattentive parents or unresponsive youths.

(A) Parents may be charged with a misdemeanor or an infraction, and upon conviction pay a mandatory fine and attend parent skills training courses and counseling

(B) Youths may be required to do community service, attend counseling sessions, and satisfy attendance requirements.

An example of this type of program is the Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) program, operated by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. These interventions should be used in addition to the school interventions discussed in (b).

(e) Examine and correct disincentives for schools to address truancy. In some states, school funding is based in part upon a school's average daily attendance. Therefore, it is to the financial advantage of some schools to ignore the truancy problem as long as the truant students are counted as present in homeroom, rather than to accurately report, investigate, and follow-up on truants. In other areas, funding for truancy officers is either cut during budget crises or re-allocated for other school purposes. All such disincentives should be examined and corrected.

(f) Law enforcement.

(1) Through legislation and school board action, empower peace officers to intervene with school-age children on the streets during school hours. This deters such youths from becoming criminally involved, and reinforces the importance of education. This law enforcement activity may prove to be good crime control policy as well as good education policy. In Oklahoma City, for example, the implementation of such a program contributed to a 27 percent reduction in the city's daytime burglary rate.

(2) Provide sure and certain penalties for cases that do not produce success from other efforts.

Some of these recommendations may apply to certain states and communities. In some locales, these recommendations would need substantial modification. Each state and community must tailor its efforts based on the uniqueness of its own problems, resources, and solutions sought.

It is the Commission's desire to see all children benefit from society's obligation to educate them. Education must be a key component of any effort to enable children to develop into productive members of society. Truancy and expulsion, with all their attendant problems, interferes with such development and must be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated fashion. Simply ignoring truants and expelling problem students creates greater and more costly problems.

# Appendix L



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(The following are examples of truancy programs discussed in the Policy Statement on Truancy, Expulsion, and Children Out of School.)

## Youth Cornerstone

Youth Cornerstone is a non-profit community based organization devoted to promoting healthy and productive lifestyles for youth in the Oklahoma County area.

Established in 1990, Youth Cornerstone evolved from the efforts of citizens and professionals united by their concern about youth issues. Inspired by District Attorney Robert H. Macy to develop strategies for intervention and prevention at the juvenile level, these citizens developed the THRIVE (Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education) and 3D (Don't Do Drugs) Programs. Begun as pilot projects, both programs have been adopted and continued by Youth Cornerstone.

THRIVE provides an intervention for youth who are truant from school and seeks to reduce the potential for such youth to drop out of school or become involved in criminal activity.

- Over 1,700 children have been processed by THRIVE since 1989.
- The Oklahoma City Police Department reports a 27 percent decrease in daytime burglaries since the inception of THRIVE.
- The Oklahoma City Public School System reports a steady decline in the drop-out rate from 5.9 percent in 1988-1989 to 4.1 percent in 1991-1992.

3D provides young people with positive reasons for becoming and/or staying drug and alcohol free and gives them the opportunity to take a personal stand for a drug-free community.

- Over 1,300 3D Card Carriers in the Oklahoma City metro area.
- According to a survey of 700 3D members, 63 percent reported that having the 3D card is a good reason or excuse to say "No!" to alcohol or drug use.
- 32 percent of 3D Card holders feel that having the card has some influence on their decision not to use drugs or alcohol.

### **THRIVE Program**

(Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education)

The THRIVE Program was developed to address the truancy problem in Oklahoma County, and is a cooperative effort among the Oklahoma City Public Schools, Oklahoma City Police Department, District Attorney's Office, and the Oklahoma Juvenile Bureau. This program is based on legislation that allows local school boards and law enforcement agencies to authorize police officers to act as attendance officers. Through this agreement, police officers may detain minors of school age who

are not in school during school hours and transport them to the THRIVE Center. At that point, THRIVE Center staff conduct an intake interview and contact parents who are required to pick up their child.

Last year, THRIVE implemented a Social Service Intervention Program that is designed to provide a resource to children identified to be at-risk due to truant behavior. Children who have been referred to the THRIVE Center and their families are assisted to identify and access educational or other resource that will assist them to reduce truant behavior and/or address other issues that may be contributing to the child's truancy.

Each child referred to the THRIVE Center is assigned to a Case Manager who provides assessment and referral services following the child's initial contact with the Center. The Case Manager attempts to contact each family by telephone or letter to schedule an interview in the home or at the Center. During this interview, the child and his or her parents are encouraged to discuss concerns related to the truancy referral and to explore alternatives to address these concerns. A plan is mutually agreed upon, and working closely with the school system, the Case Manager assists the family to take the actions necessary to achieve its goals regarding improved school attendance for the child.

The THRIVE Program currently operates two centers. If you have questions or need additional information about the THRIVE Program, please contact a Case Manager at (405) 235-6681.

### **3D (Don't Do Drugs) Program**

The 3D Program is a collaborative effort of the community, local businesses, and school systems to combat the use of alcohol and other drugs among young people in the Oklahoma County area. Based on "rewarding the positive," 3D commends those young people who have made the decision to abstain from alcohol and other drug use by offering tangible incentives. It also gives students an opportunity to make a statement that they have chosen a lifestyle free of alcohol and other drugs while taking a stand for a drug-free community.

With parental consent, students voluntarily submit to a urinalysis test as well as random drug screenings. All drug screenings are performed by laboratories certified by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Upon testing negative for drug use, students are issued a 3D Photo Identification Card that entitles them to discounts on merchandise and/or services at participating businesses and free admission to special events. Each new member is also given a 3D t-shirt, compliments of Youth Cornerstone.

Currently, there are seven 3D Chapters established within three school districts in the Oklahoma County area. Approximately 1,400 young people are active participants in these chapters. A small corps of volunteers composed of parents, school faculty, and community members is generally available to assist each 3D Chapter. Fifty-three local merchants participate in the 3D Program by offering discounts to 3D members.

Student ownership of 3D is one of the most important aspects of the program. 3D members have been instrumental in planning and conducting events and activities that allow them to associate with their peers in a drug-free environment. Such activities have included pizza parties and free

admission to a local amusement park. Students from one 3D Chapter participated in a state-wide Drug Abuse Prevention Convention earlier this year. 3D members look forward to planning and conducting more such events in the future.

During the past year, 3D published guidelines for implementation of new 3D Chapters. These guidelines provide specific instructions for developing new chapters and will facilitate the start-up process as new chapters are begun in additional schools throughout the metro area.

Future goals of 3D include developing chapters at the middle school level in the already participating school districts and implementing the 3D Program in additional school districts within the area. Youth Cornerstone also hopes to form a scholarship committee to obtain funding and develop selection criteria to provide scholarships for deserving members of 3D.



# Model Drug-Free Private Sector Workplace Act