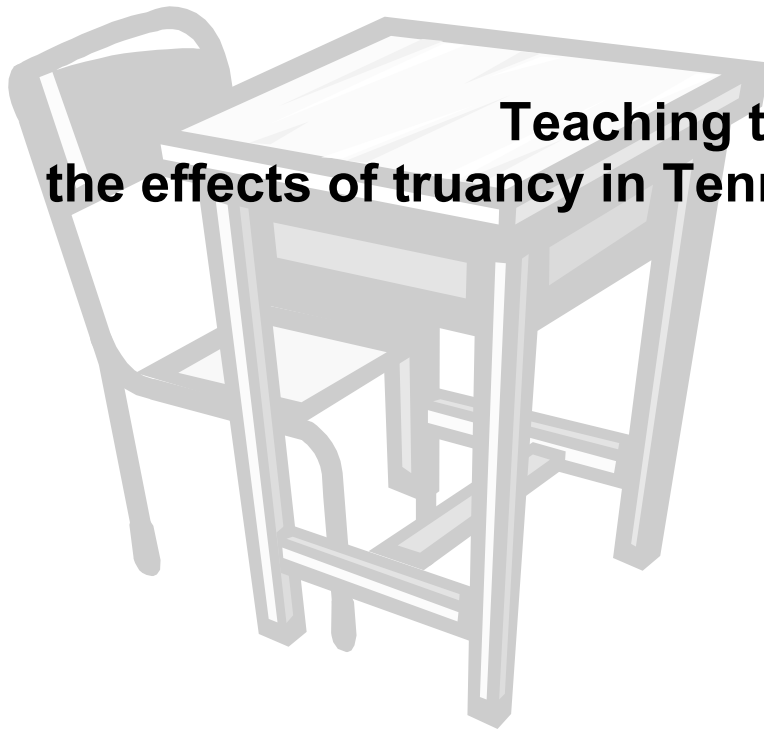


tru·ant

: one who shirks duty;
especially : one who stays
out of school
without permission



Teaching to empty desks: the effects of truancy in Tennessee schools

**John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability**

January 2004



STATE OF TENNESSEE

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

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Comptroller

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January 12, 2003

The Honorable John S. Wilder
Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
and
Members of the General Assembly
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is a report that examines the consequences of truancy in schools. The report examines Tennessee's compulsory school attendance laws and rules and identifies the extent to which truancy is a problem in the state's schools. The report makes recommendations for policy changes that may reduce student absence in schools.

Sincerely,

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

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**Teaching to empty desks:
the effects of truancy in Tennessee schools**

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**John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability**

January 2004

The Office of Education Accountability was created in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury by *Tennessee Code Annotated* 4-3-308 to monitor the performance of school boards, superintendents, school districts, schools, and school personnel in accordance with the performance standards set out in the Education Improvement Act or by regulations of the State Board of Education. The office is to conduct such studies, analyses, or audits as it may determine necessary to evaluate education performance and progress, or as may be assigned to it by the Governor or General Assembly.

Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability.
Authorization Number 307312, 600 copies, January 2004. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$1.91 per copy.

Executive Summary

On an average school day, an estimated 50,000 of Tennessee’s k-12 students are absent. In an average 180-day school year, a student with a 93 percent attendance rate—close to the state average rate of 92.6 percent—can miss up to 13 days or over two full weeks of school per year. Many of these students justify the absence with a written excuse from a physician, parent, or guardian. When a student does not produce an adequate excuse, school administrators record the absence as unexcused. In most local education agencies, any unexcused absence for a full day or the majority of a day constitutes truancy.

Truancy negatively affects both students and communities. Students who exhibit truant behavior tend to have lower achievement levels, lower earning potential, and higher dropout rates. Studies have determined that truant children are more likely to participate in deviant activities and can significantly increase the daytime crime rates in communities.

The reasons that students engage in truancy vary greatly. The motivations that are most often cited include familial pressures, school related frustrations, peer influence, economic difficulties, or individual physical, emotional, or psychological problems. Creating truancy programs to address each of these factors is challenging for most school districts. However, some systems, including those in Henry County and Memphis City Schools, have developed model programs by enlisting the assistance of other community agencies.

To encourage the creation of truancy programs, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 823 in 2002, allowing local school districts to partner with law enforcement agencies to address truancy issues. The bill created a debate between opponents who feared racial profiling in ensuing programs and proponents who hoped law enforcement agencies would help to eliminate the truancy problem. This renewed interest in truancy prevention and intervention led the Office of Education Accountability to study the subject.

The purpose of this study is to:

- Examine the compulsory school attendance laws and rules in Tennessee
- Identify the extent to which truancy is a problem in Tennessee schools
- Examine the role of attendance officers or teachers in truancy prevention and intervention
- Analyze various approaches to truancy prevention both in Tennessee and other states
- Recommend programs and policy changes that may reduce truancy in schools

The study concludes:

Most of the attendance policy making and enforcement occurs at the local level, but varies greatly among districts. Because the state law only offers a general guideline, local school boards have been left to create their own attendance policies. Although attendance goals are included in the State Board’s Accountability Model, specific rules pertaining to attendance were deleted in conjunction with the Education Improvement Act of 1992. The extent to which school boards define the consequences for nonattendance varies greatly among districts. Complete and well-publicized policies serve as an important tool to inform students and parents about their responsibilities. (See page 11.)

The Department of Education provides little guidance or training on truancy prevention. The majority of attendance officers surveyed indicate that they did not receive any state-sponsored training when they started in the position. The only professional development that most respondents identified was the Department of Education's statewide or regional attendance supervisors' meetings. Over the past two years these meetings have dealt primarily with attendance reporting, software selection, and state regulations rather than prevention strategies. Also, the Department of Education's Attendance Manual focuses mainly on documentation, providing no written guidance about truancy prevention or intervention. (See page 11.)

The majority of attendance officers believe that their caseload is too large, and they face difficult challenges in enforcing the state's compulsory education laws. In response to an Office of Education Accountability survey, more than 50 percent of attendance personnel indicated that their caseload was too large. The number of referrals reported per month ranged from less than one to well over 100. Besides the large caseloads, attendance personnel also have difficulty contacting truant students' families. (See page 12.)

The Department of Education has taken steps to meet the reporting requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states to report truancy rates to the federal government. Currently, the Department of Education collects information about the total number of absences, but does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If the federal government refuses to accept ADA rates to meet the truancy reporting requirement, Tennessee will have to begin collecting more detailed statistics about unexcused absences. (See page 12.)

Allowing each district to select its attendance software system decreases reliability and increases cost across the state. Because there is no standard data collection process, agencies that rely on school attendance data, including the Department of Education, juvenile court judges, and truancy prosecutors may not know how to interpret the information. At least one juvenile judge has had significant problems with electronic school data and will not accept it as evidence in the courtroom. Also, because the state does not currently monitor or maintain the software packages, districts bear the cost of updating, maintaining, and debugging the programs. (See page 13.)

Schools have little financial incentive to improve student attendance. Tennessee calculates the BEP funding formula using Average Daily Membership (ADM) rates, or the number of students enrolled in a school, whether they are present or absent. This calculation does not take absences into account, making attendance irrelevant to the funding formula. Using ADM to calculate school funding helps local education agencies address fixed costs, but provides no financial incentive to improve attendance.

The Department of Education counts attendance toward an incentive award for high performing schools, but these awards are small and may not provide enough incentive for schools to commit to improving attendance. (See page 13.)

Because of the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders Act, the juvenile courts have few options to deal with habitually truant students. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974 required states to begin placing status offenders in “shelter facilities” rather than juvenile detention or correctional facilities. For habitual truants who repeatedly appear in the court system, these non-secure placements provide an opportunity for the student to receive counseling and assessment services without any distractions from within the home. Because the state operates only one Observation and Assessment Center with 15 beds, the courts have limited opportunities to place truants in short-term residential services. Therefore, children may have to remain in their homes or face longer stays at other facilities. (See pages 13-14.)

Addressing truant behavior swiftly and creatively may be a key to reducing the dropout rate, but schools provide few alternative educational opportunities for truant children. Truancy is a time sensitive issue with children continuing to fall farther behind as long as the problem remains unaddressed. Although school districts are required to notify parents after five unexcused absences, each school has a different policy of reporting truantries to attendance officers and the juvenile court. Some schools report when a child has five unexcused absences while others wait until the child has many more. Students who are truant may need additional assistance or nontraditional study options to help alleviate pressure from work or family obligations. Tennessee currently offers two educational alternatives: GED Option and adult high schools, neither of which provide long term alternatives to students who are under age 17. In addition, alternative schools provide a temporary placement for students who require a more structured setting. (See page 14.)

The truancy recidivism rates vary dramatically across the state. According to survey respondents, between zero and 90 percent of students are referred to attendance personnel more than once a year. Twenty-five out of 121 survey respondents indicated that recidivists comprise more than 40 percent of their referrals. (See pages 14-15.)

Truants who eventually become high school dropouts may be a burden to Tennessee’s economy. A study published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* suggests that allowing a youth to drop out of high school and become involved in crime and drug abuse costs the community \$2.2 million over his or her lifetime. In 10 local education agencies, the dropout rate exceeds five percent. (See pages 16-17.)

Survey results and other research suggest that parental disengagement is one of the most common causes of truancy, but Tennessee lags behind other states in parental involvement measures. The State Board of Education’s parent/family involvement policy offers no specific strategies to help schools or districts improve. Of the 128 attendance officers responding to the OEA survey, 60 percent identified parental disengagement, neglect, or indifference as a leading cause of truancy. According to *Education Week’s* Quality Counts 2003, Tennessee lags behind other states in parent involvement measures. While Tennessee has developed a policy to encourage parent and family involvement, Maryland and other states have provided more specific strategies and activities for the Department of Education, schools, and parents. These strategies and activities offer a concrete guide for all parties involved. (See pages 17-18.)

The effectiveness of the relationships school districts have with both law enforcement agencies and the judicial system varies greatly, according to survey respondents. In 2002, the General Assembly passed Public Chapter 823, allowing local education agencies to partner with law enforcement agencies, but some school officials still seek more active involvement from the police and sheriffs' departments. Because truancy has been linked to juvenile delinquency, law enforcement agencies are often a logical partner in truancy prevention efforts. Only about one quarter of survey respondents indicated that they receive referrals from their local police or sheriff's department. Although the vast majority of respondents stated that they received cooperation from their local law enforcement agency, 10 percent stated that they had no relationship or a less than cooperative relationship.

The court serves as a final arbitrator of truancy issues, delivering court orders that require students to be in school and handing out sentences to truant students and their families. In 2001, the juvenile courts received approximately 8,500 referrals for truancy.¹ (See pages 18-19.)

Many school districts do not limit the number of absences that parents can excuse with a written note. In most school districts, a parent's note can excuse a student from an unlimited number of school days. However, some attendance personnel commented that this policy allows students to abuse the system. (See page 18.)

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) offers six truancy prevention grants, but the same counties have received the grants for the past eight years.² The six grant recipients must provide a report to DCS each year, but they do not have to reapply for the funding. Because of the recent budget cuts, the 103rd General Assembly considered reducing or eliminating the truancy prevention grants; ultimately, however, the legislature decided to maintain the grants at the previous year's level for 2003. (See pages 19-20.)

The report presents both legislative and administrative alternatives, listed below and in full on pages 21 through 23.

Legislative Alternatives

The General Assembly may wish to reduce the age at which a student can participate in adult high school programs from 17 to 16 years old.

The General Assembly may wish to limit the number of absences that a student can accumulate before he or she must be referred to the judicial system.

Administrative Alternatives

If the General Assembly alters the age at which students can participate in adult high school programs, the State Board of Education should revise Rule 0520-1-2-.05 (d) accordingly.

¹ William Center, Director of Information Systems, Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

² Programs exist in Dyersburg City Schools, Blount County, Decatur County, Henry County, Lauderdale County, and Sullivan County.

Because of the family's important role in truancy prevention, the State Board of Education should enhance its parent/family involvement policy and provide guidance for a reasonable number of absences that parents can excuse with a note. In addition, the State Board in conjunction with the Department of Education should provide local boards of education with guidelines for developing comprehensive attendance policies.

The BEP Review Committee may wish to consider recommending an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) component to the BEP formula. The Department of Education may also want to consider other incentives (financial or otherwise) for school districts to meet attendance goals.

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) should maintain the truancy prevention grants at least at their current level and consider opening up the program for more applicants.

Commissioners of the Departments of Children's Services and Education may wish to convene a joint staff work group with the goal of improving communication between the two departments about truant students who are in state custody.

The Department of Children's Services may wish to renew efforts to create non-secure housing facilities for habitual truants who repeatedly appear in the juvenile court system.

To alleviate the recidivism problem for truant children, school districts may need to reduce attendance officers' caseloads, and increase follow-up services and educational alternatives for truants.

Departmental Response:

The Commissioner of Education and the Executive Director of the State Board of Education concurred with the report's recommendations. See Appendix G for their letters of response.

Introduction

On an average school day, an estimated 50,000 of Tennessee's k-12 students are absent. Many of these students justify the absence with a written excuse from a physician, parent, or guardian. When a student does not produce an adequate excuse, school administrators record the absence as unexcused. In most local education agencies, any unexcused absence for a full day or the majority of a day constitutes truancy.

Truancy negatively affects both students and communities. Students who exhibit truant behavior tend to have lower achievement levels, lower earning potential, and higher dropout rates. Studies have determined that truant children are more likely to participate in deviant activities and can significantly increase the daytime crime rates in communities. Truancy can also increase the burden on social service agencies because individuals with poor school records and/or no high school degree have more difficulty finding a job and maintaining self-sufficiency. Finally, because school funding is based on average daily membership (ADM), schools with high dropout rates may lose funding for lower enrollment.

The reasons that students engage in truancy vary greatly, but often include familial pressures, school related frustrations, peer influence, economic difficulties, or individual physical, emotional, or psychological problems. Creating truancy programs to address each of these factors is challenging for most school districts. However, some have developed model programs by enlisting the assistance of other community agencies.

To encourage the creation of truancy programs, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 823 in 2002, allowing local school districts to partner with law enforcement agencies to address truancy issues. The bill created a debate between opponents who feared racial profiling in ensuing programs and proponents who hoped law enforcement agencies would help to eliminate the truancy problem. This renewed interest in truancy prevention and intervention led the Office of Education Accountability to study the subject.

The purpose of this study is to

- Examine the compulsory school attendance laws and rules in Tennessee
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- Examine the role of attendance officers or teachers in truancy prevention and intervention
- Analyze various approaches to truancy prevention both in Tennessee and other states
- Recommend programs and policy changes that may reduce truancy in schools

Methodology

The information and recommendations provided in this report are based on:

1. a review of all federal and state legislation pertaining to compulsory education and school attendance
2. an interview with and supplemental information from staff of the Memphis City Schools' Truancy Assessment Center
3. interviews with attendance officers and juvenile court personnel

4. a survey of attendance personnel across Tennessee¹
5. a review of local school board attendance policies
6. a literature review of relevant research articles and studies
7. an analysis of other states' compulsory education laws
8. performance data and other material gathered from the Department of Education, the Department of Safety, and the Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
9. a review of truancy programs in Tennessee and other states

Background

The average daily attendance rate for high school students in Tennessee is 92.6 percent. In an average 180-day school year, a student with a 93 percent attendance rate can miss up to 13 days or over two full weeks of school per year. The next two sections examine the origin of compulsory education laws in the United States and Tennessee's current legislation.

History of Compulsory Education

In 1642, the Massachusetts colony established the first compulsory education statute in the New World. The law reflected the colonists' desire to create a generation of good citizens and pious church members.² The statute required parents or masters to provide education in reading and a trade and gave selectmen the authority to enforce the law.³ Although this early legislation required children to receive some training, public schools were not statutorily authorized until Massachusetts passed "The Old Deluder Satan Act" in 1647. The law originated from a belief that Satan used ignorance to keep individuals away from the Scriptures and a pious lifestyle.⁴ To protect the colony from damnation, the 1647 legislation created schools and appointed teachers to serve in them.⁵ These early legislative efforts established the state's right to compel education and created the means for providing such education, but they did not institute any attendance requirements.⁶

Despite the creation of the means for education, the states did not require students to attend school until the Massachusetts School Attendance Act of 1852 forced parents to send their children to public school for at least 12 weeks.⁷ Tennessee eventually followed Massachusetts' lead, passing its first compulsory education law as Public Chapter 483 on April 12, 1905.⁸ By 1918, all states in the union had enacted compulsory education statutes. Tennessee's laws have evolved into Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) Title 49, Section 6, Chapters 3001-3005.

¹ Office of Education Accountability (OEA) staff surveyed attendance personnel in each local education agency in April and May 2003. (See Appendix C.) 128 responses were collected from 101 districts. (See Appendix D for a list of districts that responded.) Only 10 districts reported having more than one person handling attendance issues.

² Lawrence Kotin and William F. Aikman, *Legal Foundations of Compulsory School Attendance*, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980) p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁶ Michael S. Katz, *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*, (Bloomington, IL: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976), p.13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.18.

Tennessee Compulsory Education Laws

The federal government has allowed each state to create its own compulsory education legislation. The state laws vary by age requirement, definitions of truancy, and penalties for non-compliance. For an excerpt of Tennessee's compulsory education legislation see Appendix A. T.C.A. §49-6-3001 requires that children between the ages of 6 and 17 attend school regularly. The local board of education is ultimately responsible for enforcing the compulsory education laws, but they may employ attendance teachers to implement attendance policies.⁹

Although the law provides no clear definition of truancy, T.C.A. §49-6-3007(e) requires schools to notify the superintendent of any student who acquires five unexcused absences within a school year. The superintendent then must notify the student's parent or guardian about the truancy. If the child's guardian does not comply with the letter within three days of its receipt, the judicial system can assess a fine of up to \$50 or five hours of community service against the guardians. Pursuant to T.C.A. §49-6-3010, the juvenile or general sessions court has the authority to hear truancy cases except in cities maintaining a separate school system in which the city recorder or city judge may hear the cases. As an alternative to using the judicial system, the school system may also suspend or expel students because of truancy.¹⁰

The compulsory education laws are further supported by laws affecting benefits in Tennessee's welfare system, Families First, and motor vehicle licenses. T.C.A. §71-3-154 requires Families First participants to include school attendance in their personal responsibility plans. Failure to keep children in school may result in a 20 percent reduction in benefits.¹¹ Tennessee law also requires that students maintain high attendance records in order to obtain and maintain a motor vehicle license. Pursuant to T.C.A. §49-6-3017, children under 18 years of age with more than 10 consecutive or 15 cumulative unexcused absences during a semester are not eligible to receive a motor vehicle permit or license and may have their license or permit revoked by the Department of Safety. These laws reinforce the compulsory education laws by defining clear consequences for failing to comply.

Truancy Indicators

According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, 33 percent of U.S. high school seniors skipped at least one day of school during a four week period in 2000.¹² In 2001-02, Tennessee schools distributed almost 30,000 suspensions for attendance issues.¹³ Although it is clear that nonattendance is a problem, truancy is notoriously difficult to document. States and local jurisdictions use different definitions of truancy and do not collect any data specifically labeled as such. Because Tennessee does not require schools to report the percentage of unexcused absences, it is impossible to determine the true extent of the truancy problem without examining information from each school. Given the difficulty with this type of data collection process, this research relies on more readily available indicators to demonstrate the truancy problem in Tennessee. These indicators are defined in Exhibit 1 below.

⁹ T.C.A. §49-6-3006.

¹⁰ T.C.A. §49-6-3401.

¹¹ T.C.A. §71-3-154 (h)(D)(2).

¹² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, "The Condition of Education 2002," June 2002, p. 71.

¹³ Tennessee Department of Education, Research and Information Services, Suspension and Expulsion Data, 2001-2002.

Exhibit 1: Truancy Indicators for Tennessee

Percent of Teens Who Are High School Dropouts (2000)	11
High School Average Daily Attendance Rate for TN (2002)	92.6
Number of Drivers Licenses Suspensions for Attendance (2002)	6,488
Number of Truancy Cases Brought before Juvenile Courts (2001)	8,549
Number of Suspensions for Attendance (2002)	29,806
Percent of Survey Respondents Indicating that Truancy is a Problem (2003)	63
Number of Expulsions for Attendance (2002)	215

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Department of Safety, OREA Attendance Personnel Survey, and Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Causes of Truancy

Truancy can be caused by a variety of economic, familial, school-related, and individual factors. Elementary students tend to exhibit truancy problems because of family routines or parental difficulties. Older students, however, often have personal and social reasons to become truant. Exhibit 2 lists some of the more common causes of truancy.

Exhibit 2: Common Causes of Truancy

<p>School Related Friends are truants Poor relationship with teachers Not engaged with material Avoid being bullied or teased</p>	<p>Individual Low self-esteem Alcohol or drug abuse Language barrier Lack of adequate social skills</p>
<p>Economic Must work to support family Needed in family business Family cannot afford uniform Poverty</p>	<p>Familial Parents do not value education Family moves frequently Lack of parental discipline Must care for younger siblings</p>

Source: David Bimler and John Kirkland, "School Truants and Truancy Motivation Sorted Out with Multidimensional Scaling," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, vol. 16, January 2001, pp. 75-102.

Effects of Truancy

Truancy creates a number of problems for students, schools, and communities. Truant youth are more likely to become involved in delinquent activities, drop out of school, participate in drug use, and face other academic difficulties. These negative consequences may lead to increased costs to schools and communities.¹⁴

School Achievement

Students who regularly attend school increase their likelihood of academic achievement. A recent study in Minneapolis found that students with attendance rates of 95 percent or better

¹⁴ Jay DeKalb, "Student Truancy," *ERIC Digest*, April 1999.

were twice as likely to pass state administered tests than students with 85 percent attendance.¹⁵ With the state placing more emphasis on standardized testing, attendance may become a key component to achieving school success.

Drug Use

Students who are disengaged from school are more likely to have drug-using friends and to abuse drugs themselves. Associating with students who cut school and who abuse drugs may increase the likelihood of substance abuse among teenagers.¹⁶ A recent study found that truant behavior is a more accurate predictor of drug use than either grade point average or sexual activity.¹⁷ Because truancy is so closely linked to drug use, truancy prevention programs may also help to combat substance abuse among Tennessee students.

Dropout Rates

Behavior problems such as truancy and tardiness are often a precursor to dropping out.¹⁸ In 2001, almost four percent of Tennessee high school students left before receiving a degree.¹⁹ However, in 10 local education agencies the dropout rate exceeds five percent. In general, dropouts have lower average earnings and are three times more likely than high school completers to be welfare recipients.²⁰ Dropouts may also be more likely to become involved in criminal activity; the Tennessee Department of Correction estimates that 43 percent of inmates have less than a 12th grade education.²¹ Finally, higher dropout rates may translate into lower ADM rates which can reduce funding for local education agencies.

Juvenile Delinquency

Researchers have often described truancy as a “stepping stone” to more serious delinquent activities.²² Like underage drinking and running away, truancy is a status offense, or an activity that would not be criminal if committed by a legal adult. Although status offenses are generally considered less serious than delinquent behaviors, truancy may be among only a few status offenses that lead to more serious violations in the future.²³ A 1995 report by the Los Angeles County Office of Education suggests that absences from school are one of the most powerful predictors of delinquency.²⁴ Given the relationship between truancy and crime, truancy

¹⁵ Robert C. Johnston, “As Studies Stress Link to Scores, Districts Get Tough on Attendance,” *Education Week*, Oct. 18, 2000.

¹⁶ Alison L. Bryant and Marc A. Zimmerman, “Examining the Effects of Academic Beliefs and Behaviors on Changes in Substance Use Among Urban Adolescents,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 94, 2002, pp. 621-637.

¹⁷ Denise Hallfors, Jak Vevea, Bonita Iritani, HyunSan Cho, Shereen Khatapoush, and Leonard Saxe, “Truancy, Grade Point Average, and Sexual Activity: A Meta-Analysis of Risk Indicators for Youth Substance Use,” *Journal of School Health*, May 2002.

¹⁸ Shay Bilchik, “Community Assessment Centers: A Discussion of the Concept’s Efficacy,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Nov. 1995.

¹⁹ TN Department of Education, *Annual Report 2001: School Year 2000-2001*, Nov. 2001.

²⁰ General Accounting Office, “School Dropouts: Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies,” U.S. General Accounting Office, Feb. 2002.

²¹ “Inmate Education Level” Fax from Department of Correction, Dec. 2, 2002.

²² Eileen M. Garry, “Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems,” *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Oct. 1996.

²³ Randall G. Shelden, John A. Horvath, and Sharon Tracy, “Do Status Offenders Get Worse? Some Clarifications on the Question of Escalation,” *Crime and Delinquency*, April 1989, pp.202-216.

²⁴ Beth Shuster, “L.A. School Truancy Exacts a Growing Social Price,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1995.

prevention programs may be effective in reducing daytime crime rates and decreasing the likelihood that children will become lifetime offenders.²⁵

Effective Truancy Programs

Because truancy is a problem that not only affects the student, but also the student's family, school, and community, truancy prevention programs often coordinate the efforts of many institutions. Across the country, organizations are using legislation, community-based intervention, school-based alternatives, and criminal justice solutions to address truancy. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *Manual to Combat Truancy*, schools that have the most success in truancy reduction tend to combine sanctions with incentives. Exhibit 3 outlines the U.S. Department of Education's five principles of effective truancy programs.

Exhibit 3: Five Principles of Effective Truancy Programs

1. **Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities** – By fostering parental involvement in the school, administrators can increase communication and trust between the parent and the school. Personal contact with parents is an important component to handling truancy problems.
2. **Ensure that students face firm sanctions for truancy** – Schools must communicate to students and families that truancy will not be tolerated. Sanctions should be firm and timely.
3. **Create meaningful incentives for parental responsibility** – Schools can create incentive programs both for parents and children. Positive incentives may include participation in publicly funded activities or parenting education classes. Negative sanctions like fines and imprisonment may also be necessary for promoting parental responsibility.
4. **Establish ongoing truancy prevention programs in school** – Truancy is often a symptom of a much larger problem. Schools should address the underlying needs of each child to ensure that truancy is not a reoccurring behavior. Students may also need alternative learning environments including school-to-work opportunities, community service, or vocational programs.
5. **Involve local law enforcement in truancy reduction efforts** – Relationships between school officials and law enforcement agencies ensure that violations of compulsory education laws are prosecuted. Police departments, juvenile courts, and probation officers can become important allies in addressing truancy.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Manual to Combat Truancy*, July 1996.

A study to evaluate truancy reduction projects in Wisconsin also suggested that school-based programs should address truancy problems swiftly, provide early intervention services, make personal contact with parents, and make consistent efforts to address every truancy case.²⁶ These principles of truancy prevention assure students that school officials will not tolerate truancy and will act on all unexcused absences.

Statewide Truancy Initiatives

Attendance Officers and Supervisors

According to T.C.A. §49-6-3006, any local board of education or superintendent may employ at least one full-time attendance officer. Small school districts may share an attendance teacher when appropriate. Attendance teachers receive the same tenure and retirement benefits as other

²⁵ Matt Lait, "Truancy Crackdown Tied to Drop in Daytime Crime," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1997, pp. 1-5.

²⁶ "A Best Practices Review: Truancy Reduction Efforts," *Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau*, Aug. 2000.

school personnel. Almost all school districts employ some personnel to handle attendance issues. In small districts, the attendance personnel may serve multiple functions, often as other types of administrators. In large districts, the school board may employ an attendance supervisor to coordinate the efforts of many attendance teachers whose sole function is to handle attendance issues. The attendance teacher's general purpose is to enforce Tennessee's compulsory education laws. In an effort to return children to school, attendance teachers often serve as a mediator between the families of truant children, the school district, and the juvenile justice system.

Department of Children's Services

DCS becomes formally involved in individual truancy cases when a court classifies students as unruly. According to T.C.A. §37-1-102(b)(23), a child who "habitually and without justification is truant from school while subject to compulsory school attendance under T.C.A. §49-6-3007" may be declared unruly. DCS provides a Family Crisis Intervention Program (FCIP) for families with unruly children. T.C.A. §37-1-132 requires the judge to enlist FCIP services before the court can commit an unruly child to DCS custody. If the crisis intervention strategy fails to improve school attendance, children can be taken out of the home and placed in DCS custody.²⁷ In 2001-2002, the Family Crisis Intervention Program diverted 6,394 children from state custody.²⁸

Department of Human Services

In March 2001, 59,623 families participated in Families First, Tennessee's welfare program. According to Department of Human Services (DHS) policy, Families First participants must maintain school enrollment and regular attendance for their children or face a reduction in benefits. The attendance requirements apply to married and unmarried minors enrolled in the Families First program either as parents or as children. DHS verifies compliance during the assistance application process and during the six month review. Failure to comply with the attendance requirement may result in a single 20 percent reduction in benefits and possible removal of the unmarried minor parent from the program.²⁹ DHS does not currently keep a record of reductions resulting from school attendance.³⁰

Department of Safety

Along with at least 15 other states, Tennessee requires children to present proof of attendance and academic progress to obtain a driver's license or permit.³¹ According to T.C.A. §49-6-3017, students with 10 consecutive or 15 cumulative unexcused absences are not eligible to hold a Tennessee driver's license. To enforce this law, each school must notify the Department of Safety when a student drops out of school. The Department of Safety can then revoke the student's license until he or she can produce evidence of satisfactory academic progress. The Department of Safety also requires new applicants under 18 years of age to produce evidence

²⁷ Department of Children's Services, Family Crisis Intervention Program, Procedure Manual, revised Feb. 2002.

²⁸ Tennessee Department of Children's Services, "2001-2002 Annual Report, Building Tennessee's Future, One Child at a Time," accessed May 12, 2003, <http://www.state.tn.us/youth>.

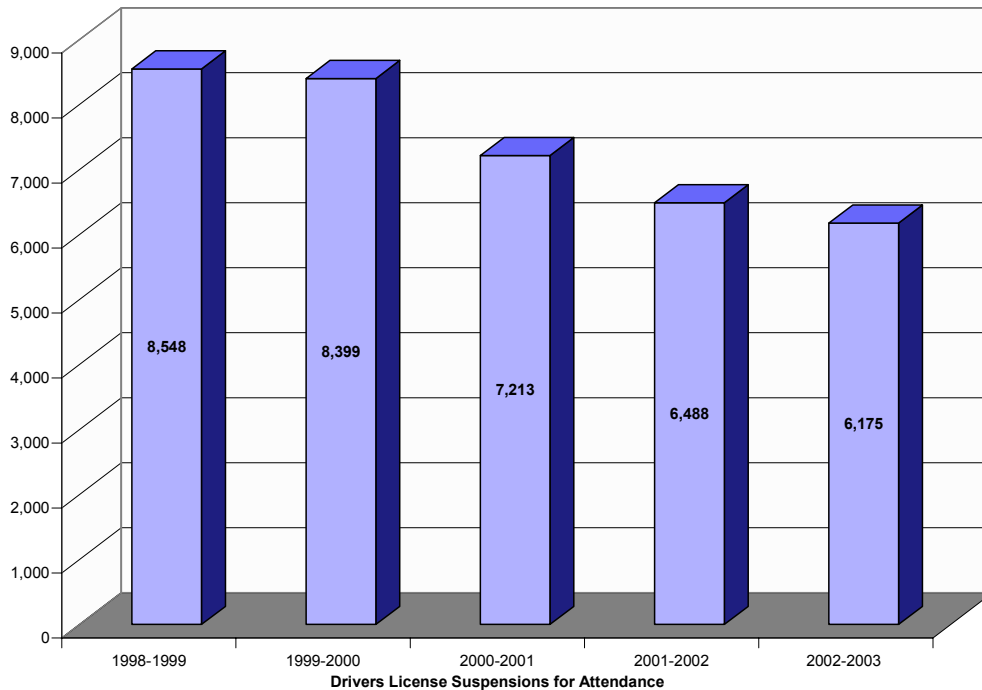
²⁹ Department of Human Services, School Attendance, Policy Statement.

³⁰ Penny R. Smith, Department of Human Services, "Fwd: Re: truancy and benefits," E-mail to the author, May 8, 2003.

³¹ Robert C. Johnston, "15 States Link School Status, Student Driving," *Education Week*, Nov. 6, 1996.

that they are currently enrolled in or have already graduated from high school.³² Exhibit 4 demonstrates that from 1998 to the present, the number of driver's license suspensions for attendance has consistently decreased. However, it is impossible to determine whether the decrease is a result of less enforcement of the law or of greater academic achievement.

Exhibit 4: Number of Driver's License Suspensions for Attendance over Time



Source: Tennessee Department of Safety, *Annual Report 2001-2002* and Lisa Knight, Department of Safety, "Re: License Suspensions," e-mail to the author, July 25, 2003.

Juvenile Court System

In many districts, the juvenile court system serves as an important ally in combating truancy. As an enforcement agent for school districts, the juvenile courts hear truancy cases and can sentence parents to a \$50 fine or five hours of community service for each truancy incident. The court system can also place the child under a court order to attend school. Students who ignore the court order face more serious consequences when they return to the judicial system. According to T.C.A. §37-1-102, the court may also declare a child unruly for habitual truancy. Unruly children face a fine of up to \$50, community service, probation, or removal from the home. In 2001, the juvenile courts received approximately 8,500 referrals for truancy.³³ In some counties, truancy accounted for over 20 percent of all court referrals. (See Appendix F for a complete list of truancy referrals by county.)

³² Department of Safety, Tennessee Driver Handbook, accessed Sept. 30, 2002, <http://www.state.tn.us/safety/graphics/manual.pdf>

³³ William Center, Director of Information Systems, Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, "Re: Data Request," E-mail to the author, Feb. 11, 2003.

Local Truancy Initiatives

This section highlights some of the local programs that work to address truancy in Tennessee. While this list is not exhaustive, it highlights one rural and one urban program as well as general practices used throughout the state.

Memphis Truancy Assessment Center

In the 2000-01 school year, Memphis City and Shelby County Schools recorded truancy events for 18,000 different students. The Memphis Truancy Assessment Center (TAC) began with a \$105,000 grant from the Memphis Police Department in 2000.³⁴ A major impetus for the grant was a report linking juvenile crime and truancy.³⁵ TAC developed as a collaborative project among 10 different agencies, including the Shelby County District Attorney General, the Memphis City and Shelby County School Districts, the Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County, and Memphis and Shelby County law enforcement agencies. After the original \$105,000 grant, the grant funding has been reduced every year. In 2003, TAC received only \$11,000 in grant funding, but has made up the difference with financial support from the Memphis City School District.³⁶

TAC provides a central location for truant students to be processed when they are picked up during the day. Since a lawsuit brought by a home school family last year, the police have been more reluctant to confront potentially truant students on the street. To ensure that law enforcement officials know which children are truant, TAC provides a list of all truant students to the police every week and has installed a police radio at the Center. TAC also provides lists of truant students to John Sorrels, the Juvenile Court Truancy Prosecutor. Because of the volume of cases, the court generally prosecutes only cases involving children under the age of 12.³⁷ Truancy cases involving older children are usually handled with written notices from the court. To ensure that students and their families receive the services they need, TAC also works to identify the source of the attendance problems, offers services and referrals, and helps parents and students work to resolve barriers to attendance. TAC's collaborative approach has significantly improved recidivism rates over the past few years. In 1999-00, 24 percent of truants were repeat offenders. By 2001-02, that rate dropped to only three percent.

Henry County Truancy Prevention Program

The Henry County Truancy Prevention Program began in 1993 with a grant from the Department of Children's Services. Since the program's inception, the number of truant students has decreased from 800 in 1994-95 to 397 in 2000-01.³⁸ The program works in the Henry County and the Paris Special School Districts and employs three individuals - two with grant funds and one with district funds. Students become involved in the program through referrals from

³⁴ Interview with Jim MacFarlane, Coordinator – Pupil Services Center, Memphis City Schools
John Hall, Manager, Truancy Assessment Center, Memphis City Schools, March 24, 2003.

³⁵ “Reducing Crime and Supporting Education through a Comprehensive Truancy Reduction Strategy” by the Memphis and Shelby County Crime Commission. The study found that juvenile crime peaked during school hours, suggesting that truancy often leads to delinquency.

³⁶ Interview with Jim MacFarlane, Coordinator – Pupil Services Center, Memphis City Schools
John Hall, Manager, Truancy Assessment Center, Memphis City Schools, March 24, 2003.

³⁷ Interview with John Sorrells, Memphis Juvenile Court Truancy Prosecutor, March 24, 2003.

³⁸ Grant Agreement between the State of Tennessee, Department of Children's Services and Henry County Juvenile Court, July 1, 2002.

principals and guidance counselors. Officers try to determine the underlying reasons for truancy and provide access to a number of referral agencies. Instead of having one isolated contact with students, the program follows students throughout the year to ensure that they attend regularly and to encourage them to work towards a GED before giving up.

During the summer, the staff contacts all students who were on their roster at the end of the previous year to ensure that the students are aware of registration and are prepared to attend in the fall. The Henry County program focuses on individual attention and intensive follow-up care. By monitoring students for an entire year, the staff can intervene to prevent new problems and can provide consistency for students and families. The Henry County Truancy Prevention Program currently operates on a DCS grant of \$72,270, but the funding may not be available next year.

Other Local Initiatives

Youth Courts—Across the country, teen courts serve as an alternative to the juvenile justice system and allow young people to participate in a judicial process. T.C.A. §37-1-702 permits juvenile court judges to establish teen court programs consisting of five teen members. The courts are authorized to hear cases ranging from burglary to truancy. National evaluations have found that teen courts may reduce recidivism.³⁹ Tennessee currently operates eight teen courts and may install up to four more by the fall of 2003.⁴⁰

Daytime Curfews—A 1997 study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 72 out of 347 surveyed cities imposed daytime curfews. All of the cities with daytime curfews reported that the ordinance reduces daytime burglary and truancy violations.⁴¹ In Tennessee, at least two cities, Memphis and Nashville, have enacted daytime curfew ordinances, prohibiting unaccompanied children under the age of 18 from being in public spaces during school hours.

Truancy or Attendance Review Boards—Eighty-one of the 131 school board attendance rules collected included provisions for a truancy or attendance review board. These boards tend to be made up of various school and district representatives, but they can involve individuals from the community or the juvenile court system as well.

³⁹ Jeffery A. Butts, Janeen Buck, and Mark B. Coggeshall, *The Impact of Teen Court on Young Offenders*, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, 2002.

⁴⁰ Youth courts currently operate in Bristol, Jefferson County, Putnam County, Jackson County, Wilson County, Sumner County, Montgomery County, and Haywood County. Anjanette Eash, Youth Court Coordinator, TN Bar Association, "Re: Youth Courts Again," E-mail to the author, June 30, 2003.

⁴¹ U.S. Conference of Mayors, "A Status Report on Youth Curfews in America's Cities, 1997," accessed June 26, 2003, <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/news/publications/curfew.htm>.

Analysis and Conclusions

Law and Policy

Most of the attendance policy making and enforcement occurs at the local level, but varies greatly among districts. Because the state law only offers a general guideline, local school boards have been left to create their own attendance policies. Although attendance goals are included in the State Board's Accountability Model, specific rules pertaining to attendance were deleted in conjunction with the Education Improvement Act of 1992. The extent to which the school boards define the consequences for nonattendance varies greatly among districts.

The Tennessee School Boards Association has helped to standardize the policies by creating an attendance policy template.⁴² The template serves as a guide by providing some of the necessary components for an effective policy, but some school districts have not used it. Appendix E uses some of the policy components recommended by Kentucky and West Virginia to analyze the completeness of policies in Tennessee's school districts. Hollow Rock Bruceton, Hawkins County, and Fayette County school districts have model policies that include all of the recommended components. Complete and well-publicized policies serve as an important tool to inform students and parents about their responsibilities.

Attendance Officer Training and Performance

The Department of Education provides little training for attendance personnel on truancy prevention. Although the majority of survey respondents stated that they received some type of professional development, 68 percent indicated that they received no training when they became attendance officers. The majority of respondents who received training when they were employed stated that their training was on-the-job, from a coworker, or from the person vacating the position. The professional development that most respondents identified was the Department of Education's statewide or regional attendance supervisors' meetings. The meetings can focus on whatever issues are most relevant to attendance personnel, but for the past two years they have dealt primarily with attendance reporting, software selection, and state regulations. Because attendance officers receive little training and professional development, they may not be aware of the most effective truancy prevention and intervention techniques.

Although the Department of Education provides an Attendance Manual for attendance personnel across the state, the manual focuses largely on documentation and includes no information on truancy prevention or intervention.⁴³ Without adequate training and resources, attendance officers across the state have few resources to improve their truancy response systems.

The Department of Education recently hired a Director of Attendance after the position had been vacant for about a year. Some survey respondents expressed frustration with the level of service provided to the districts. One of the more common complaints from attendance officers was the lack of timely response from the Department before the position was filled.⁴⁴

⁴² Tennessee School Boards Association, "Attendance," accessed April 30, 2003, http://www.tsba.net/services/policy_attendance.html

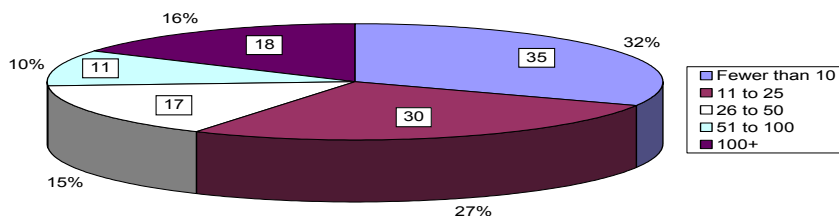
⁴³ Tennessee Department of Education, Office of Accountability, *Student Membership and Attendance Accountability Procedures Manual: Working with Membership/Attendance in Tennessee*, Oct. 1999.

⁴⁴ Attendance Personnel Survey, May 2003.

The majority of attendance officers believe that their caseload is too large, and they face difficult challenges in enforcing the state’s compulsory education laws. More than 50 percent of attendance personnel indicated that their caseload was too large. The number of referrals reported per month ranged from less than one to well over 100. Exhibit 5 illustrates the average number of referrals. All of the individuals with over 100 referrals per month also indicated that their caseload was too large. Besides the large caseloads, attendance personnel also have difficulty contacting truant students’ families. When asked to estimate what percentage of cases involve incorrect contact information, attendance personnel responded with a range of zero to 100 percent and a mean response of 28 percent. This lack of accurate contact information may be a result of poor recordkeeping, a transient population, and/or parental neglect. The large caseloads and the inaccuracy of contact information may significantly delay the processing of truancy cases across the state. Any delay in processing a truancy case puts the student at risk of academic failure.

Department of Education staff note difficulties also in obtaining necessary information from the Department of Children’s Services about truants who are in state custody. Although DCS is likely acting according to federal and state privacy requirements, such delays may hinder students’ educational progress.

Exhibit 5: Average Number of Referrals per Month⁴⁵



Source: Office of Education Accountability Attendance Personnel Survey, April and May 2003.

Data and Recordkeeping

The Department of Education has taken steps to meet the reporting requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states to report truancy rates to the federal government. Previously, the Department of Education collected information about the total number of absences, but did not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. According to the Director of Attendance, the new attendance software package should alleviate the problem. The program, according to Department staff, should allow data collection that will meet the federal requirement, as well as allow the Department to understand more clearly the truancy problem across the state.

⁴⁵ 17 respondents did not answer this question.

Allowing each district to select an attendance software system decreases reliability and increases cost across the state. Providing districts the opportunity to select the most appropriate software out of a list of eight approved packages, allows them to customize their system to meet their unique needs. However, this practice may also decrease the reliability of the data because there is no uniform policy for data entry or maintenance. Agencies that rely on school attendance data, including the Department of Education, juvenile court judges, and truancy prosecutors may not know how to interpret the information. At least one juvenile court judge has had significant problems with electronic school data and will not accept it as evidence in the courtroom.⁴⁶

Because local districts use different software packages, the state does not monitor or maintain the systems, leaving districts to bear the cost of updating, maintaining, and debugging the programs. For years, the Department of Education has been working to create a new statewide information system. Many questions about a new system have yet to be answered, including whether or not the system would be mandatory or optional for districts.⁴⁷

School Funding

Few financial incentives exist for schools to improve student attendance. Tennessee calculates the BEP funding formula using Average Daily Membership (ADM) rates or the number of students “belonging” to a school, whether they are present or absent. This calculation does not take absences into account, making attendance irrelevant to the funding formula.⁴⁸ Using ADM to calculate school funding helps local education agencies address fixed costs, but provides no financial incentive to improve attendance.

To create some financial incentive for attendance, the Department of Education provides an incentive award to high performing schools. However, these awards are small and may not provide enough incentive for schools to commit to improving attendance.

Case Outcomes

Removal from the Home

Juvenile courts have few options to deal with habitually truant students. Truancy, like under-age drinking, running away, and other crimes that are not criminal for adults, are typically known as status offenses. In the past, many status offenders were placed in secure (locked) juvenile facilities along with serious delinquents. However, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974 requires states to remove status offenders from secure facilities except under limited circumstances, but allows them to hold status offenders in non-secure “shelter facilities.”⁴⁹ In order to continue to receive federal funds under this act, Tennessee changed its law to comply with the deinstitutionalization mandate and no longer holds status offenders in secure facilities.⁵⁰ Therefore, a juvenile judge or referee has few options, other than

⁴⁶ Interview with Referee Michael O’Neil, Metro Nashville Juvenile Court, Feb. 4, 2003.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Interview with Elfreda Tyler, Director of Finance Research, Department of Education, February 6, 2003.

⁴⁹ James C. Howell, “NCCD’s Survey of Juvenile Detention and Correctional Facilities,” *Crime and Delinquency*, Jan. 1998, pp. 102-109.

⁵⁰ T.C.A. 37-1-132

shelter care or foster homes, to temporarily remove habitually truant students from the home for assessment.

In 1988, the Tennessee Department of Correction, Youth Services Division, developed the 1988 Juvenile Correction Plan to develop less restrictive facilities than state youth centers for non-dangerous children who needed to be removed from their homes. As part of that effort, the state planned to build nine regional Observation and Assessment Centers (Center) where judges could place children for two-week assessments before making dispositions. Upon completing the assessments, center staff would recommend to judges whether they should commit a child to the Department of Correction or whether the child would be likely to succeed with alternative services. Staff at the Center would provide on-site counseling while the child was in the facility. However, the state completed only one O&A Center, which is located in Johnson City.⁵¹ According to at least one juvenile court judge, the benefit of Centers and organizations like them is the ability to provide short-term, non-secure living situations where status offenders can receive needed services.⁵² For habitual truants who repeatedly appear in the court system, these non-secure placements provide an opportunity for the student to receive counseling and assessment services without any distractions from within the home.

School-Level Discipline

Addressing truant behavior swiftly may be a key to returning students to the school population successfully. Truancy is a time sensitive issue with children continuing to fall farther behind as long as the problem remains unaddressed. Although school districts are required to notify parents after five unexcused absences, each school has a different theory of reporting truantries to attendance officers and the juvenile court.⁵³ Some schools report when a child has five unexcused absences while others wait until the child has many more.⁵⁴ According to the OEA survey, almost half of respondents stated that students may accumulate ten or more unexcused absences before schools refer the case to an attendance officer. Because attendance officers and the juvenile court can generally be more aggressive in resolving truancy issues, any delay in reporting cases to these officials may jeopardize the student's academic success.⁵⁵

Truant children have few educational alternatives. Students who are habitually truant from school often fall behind their classmates. These students may need additional assistance to continue to learn. Truant students may also need nontraditional study options to help alleviate pressure from work or family obligations. Tennessee currently offers three educational alternatives: GED Option, adult high schools, and alternative schools.

The GED Option program allows students over the age of 17 to take the GED test instead of completing the traditional high school curriculum. Students enrolled in the program must complete 6.5 hours of instruction per day. There are currently 76 approved programs across the state. Although most programs occur during the day, several districts have classes in the evening

⁵¹ Department of Children's Services, "Specialty Programs," February 27, 2002, accessed June 23, 2003, <http://www.state.tn.us/youth/treatment/specdescrip.htm>.

⁵² Interview with Referee Michael O'Neil, Metro Nashville Juvenile Court, Feb. 4, 2003.

⁵³ Attendance Personnel Survey, May 2003.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview with Nikita Baskerville, Attendance Officer, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Feb. 5, 2003.

to accommodate working students. In 2002, 3,216 students took the GED test and 2,451 earned their GED degree.⁵⁶

Adult high schools, authorized under T.C.A. 49-1-302, 49-2-203(b)(c), and 49-6-501, provide an opportunity for students age 17 and older to earn a high school diploma at their own pace. Students are able to take classes according to a more flexible schedule, but they must still take the Tennessee Proficiency Test to graduate. Only about one third of all districts operate an adult high school.⁵⁷

The Education Improvement Act of 1992 required districts to create at least one alternative school for students in grades 7 through 12 who have been suspended or expelled from their traditional institution.⁵⁸ In 2001-02, Tennessee recorded almost 30,000 incidents of suspension for attendance issues.⁵⁹ Exhibit 6 demonstrates the number of suspensions and expulsions by race. Many of these students attend alternative schools during the course of their suspension. Alternative schools, however, serve students with a wide variety of problems and may not be the most effective sites for rehabilitating truant students.

None of the alternative options can provide younger students with a nontraditional school schedule. Because family and work obligations can be primary sources of truancy, schools with nontraditional hours may be more appropriate for some students. Only adult high schools and a few GED Option programs offer nontraditional hours, and students must be 17 years old before they become eligible for these alternatives.

Exhibit 6: Number of Attendance Suspensions and Expulsions by Race, 2001-2002

Race	Suspensions	Expulsions
White	8640	75
Black	20322	134
Hispanic	573	3
Other	271	3
Total	29806	215

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Research and Information Services, Suspension and Expulsion Data, 2001-2002.

The recidivism rates for truants vary dramatically across the state. According to survey respondents, between zero and 90 percent of students are referred to attendance personnel more than once a year.⁶⁰ Exhibit 7 illustrates that the majority of respondents indicated that fewer than 40 percent of their referrals were repeat offenders. These statistics suggest that some districts are having success in returning students to the general school population. Conversely, 25 out of 121

⁵⁶ Phone Interview with Kimberly Buck, Office of Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Education, June 26, 2003.

⁵⁷ "Listing of Adult High Schools," Tennessee Department of Adult and Community Education, accessed June 23, 2003, <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/ciadulths/ciadulths.htm>.

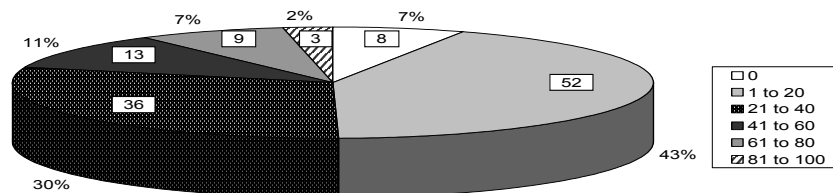
⁵⁸ OREA report Tennessee's Alternative Schools: Serving Disruptive Students.

⁵⁹ Tennessee Department of Education, Research and Information Services, Suspension and Expulsion Data, 2001-2002.

⁶⁰ Attendance Personnel Survey, May 2003.

respondents indicated that recidivists comprise more than 40 percent of their referrals. If schools do not effectively address the truancy problem, recidivism may become a pattern for juveniles. A study by the National Center for Juvenile Justice concluded that juveniles were more likely to become recidivists in the court system if their first referrals were for truancy, burglary, motor vehicle theft, or robbery.⁶¹

Exhibit 7: Average Recidivism Rate for Truants in Tennessee⁶²



Source: Office of Education Accountability Attendance Personnel Survey, April and May 2003.

Truants who eventually become high school dropouts may be a burden to Tennessee’s economy. Truancy often serves as a precursor to dropping out of school.⁶³ A study published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* suggests that allowing a youth to drop out of high school and become involved in crime and drug abuse costs the community \$2.2 million over his or her lifetime.⁶⁴ Nationally, dropouts have lower earnings and fewer job opportunities than their more educated counterparts. Exhibit 8 depicts the average annual earnings for workers at various educational levels.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services thresholds, the average income for an individual without a high school degree is barely above the poverty level for a family of four.⁶⁵ High school dropouts are less likely to be able to participate in the new economy and more likely to require public assistance.

⁶¹ Tom Gavin, “Truancy: Not Just Kids’ Stuff Anymore,” FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, March 1997.

⁶² Seven respondents did not answer this question.

⁶³ Shay Bilchik, “Community Assessment Centers: A Discussion of the Concept’s Efficacy,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Nov. 1995.

⁶⁴ Mark A. Cohen, “The Monetary Value of Saving a High-Risk Youth,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, vol. 14, pp. 5-33.

⁶⁵ According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the poverty threshold for 2002 is \$18,100 for a family of four.

**Exhibit 8: Average Annual Earnings of U.S. Workers
25 to 64 Years Old by Educational Attainment
(Earnings in 1999 dollars)**

Not High School Graduate	\$18,900
High School Graduate	\$25,900
Some College	\$31,200
Associate's Degree	\$33,000
Bachelor's Degree	\$45,400
Master's Degree	\$54,500
Professional Degree	\$99,300
Doctoral Degree	\$81,400

Source: Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Eric Newburger, "The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings," U.S. Census Bureau, July 2002

Parental Involvement

Survey results and other research suggest that parental disengagement is one of the most common causes of truancy, but Tennessee lags behind other states in parental involvement measures. Of the 128 attendance officers responding to the OEA survey, 60 percent identified parental disengagement, neglect, or indifference as a leading cause of truancy. However, none of the survey respondents offered any specific suggestions on improving parental involvement. A study of the relationship between various types of parental involvement and high school student success found higher attendance rates for students of parents who participated in school activities. Other research has found that students' academic achievement reflects the education level of their parents. This correlation may be related to parents' indifference toward education.

According to *Education Week's* Quality Counts 2003, Tennessee lags behind other states in parent involvement measures. The factors that Education Week considered are listed in Exhibit 9 along with the results from several other states.

Exhibit 9: Parental Involvement by State

State	State requires school report cards to include information on parent involvement	Percent of students in schools where a school official reports that...			
		Lack of parent involvement is not a problem or is a minor problem (2000)		More than half of parents participate in parent-teacher conferences (2000)	
		4 th grade	8 th grade	4 th grade	8 th grade
North Carolina		66	59	82	56
Missouri	X	64	56	97	66
Tennessee		58	55	67	44
Kentucky	X	55	42	72	46
Georgia		58	69	79	63
Alabama		65	50	60	46

Source: Education Week, "Quality Counts 2003: If I Can't Learn from You"

The State Board of Education has issued a policy concerning parent and family involvement. It encourages schools to work with parents by communicating regularly, promoting and supporting responsible parenting, encouraging parents to assist with student learning, welcoming parents to the school, incorporating parents into the decision making process, and making community resources available to parents.⁶⁶ Maryland has issued similar policy goals, but its plan includes specific strategies and activities for the Department of Education, schools, communities, and parents.⁶⁷ For example, under the goal “In partnership for student success, parents and community members will volunteer to improve schools and support students,” the Maryland plan offers five strategies including the “Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) will encourage schools to use volunteers during the school day and in after-school programs” and “schools will encourage families to share their cultures, careers, and traditions.” The activities recommended to achieve these strategies include the MSDE “disseminating best practices on volunteering in schools” and “expanding its mentoring program to demonstrate ways in which organizations can volunteer in schools and mentor students.”⁶⁸ These strategies and activities offer a concrete guide for all parties involved. Developing similar strategies could strengthen Tennessee’s policy.

Many school districts do not limit the number of absences that parents can excuse with a written note. In most school districts, a parent’s note can excuse a student from an unlimited number of school days. However, some attendance personnel commented that this policy allows students to abuse the system. At least 44 school districts now limit the number of parent notes that they will accept. For example, in Trousdale, Putnam, and Weakley Counties, students must supply the school with a doctor’s note after their parents have written five excuses. Policies like this limit the number of absences that a student and parent can excuse on their own and ensure that students are missing school for legitimate reasons.

Involvement of Other Agencies

The effectiveness of the relationships school districts have with both law enforcement agencies and the judicial system varies greatly, according to survey respondents. In 2002, the General Assembly passed Public Chapter 823, allowing local education agencies to partner with law enforcement agencies, but some school officials still seek more active involvement from the police and sheriff’s departments. Because truancy has been linked to juvenile delinquency, law enforcement agencies are often a logical partner in truancy prevention efforts. However, only about one quarter of survey respondents indicated that they receive referrals from their local police or sheriff’s department. Although the vast majority of respondents stated that they received cooperation from their local law enforcement agency, 10 percent stated that they had no relationship or a less than cooperative relationship with the police. Involvement by law enforcement personnel has been hampered by a lawsuit filed by a home school family in Shelby County.⁶⁹ The Memphis Police Department settled the lawsuit without going to court, but

⁶⁶ Tennessee State Board of Education, “Tennessee Parent/Family Involvement Policy,” accessed July 21, 2003, <http://www.state.tn.us/sbe/tnpi.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Student and School Services, “Maryland’s Plan for Family, School, and Community Involvement: Recommendations for Reaching Academic Success for All Students through Family, School, and Community Partnerships,” March 2003.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁶⁹ “Memphis Police Discontinue Truant Pickups,” *The Oak Ridger Online*, September 2, 1999, Accessed June 17, 2003, <http://www.oakridger.com/stories>.

officers have been reluctant to apprehend potentially truant children in Shelby County and elsewhere since then.⁷⁰ (See page 9.)

In general, the court serves as a final arbitrator of truancy issues, delivering court orders that require students to be in school and handing out sentences to truant students and their families. Some judicial districts are actively involved in prosecuting truants while others have been less cooperative with the schools. In 2001, the juvenile courts received approximately 8,500 referrals for truancy.⁷¹ In some counties, truancy referrals account for less than one percent of all referrals and over 20 percent of all court referrals in others. (See Appendix F for a complete list of truancy referrals by county.) In the more active counties, judges and district attorneys played an integral role in beginning several of the truancy prevention programs. Other districts have experimented with campus courts, bringing the courtroom to each school and avoiding long docketing delays.⁷²

However, relationships between the judicial and educational systems are not always effective. For example, the Memphis Truancy Assessment Center works with an Assistant District Attorney who handles only truancy cases. However, the district and the prosecutor do not always communicate effectively about which cases are being prosecuted and why.⁷³ Similar communication problems appeared in other districts as well.⁷⁴

The Department of Children’s Services (DCS) offers six truancy prevention grants, but the same recipients have received the grants for the past eight years. The Department of Children’s Services (DCS) offers grants to six counties for truancy prevention programs, but they have no formal guidelines for awarding the grants.⁷⁵ The grant agencies use the funding for GED classes, attendance monitoring, counseling, and vocational skills training. The grants were originally federally funded, but are now entirely funded by the state. Exhibit 10 details the recipients and grant amounts. In FY 2002, DCS truancy programs served 1,160 children.⁷⁶

Exhibit 10: Truancy Prevention Grants

Recipient	Amount
Child and Family Services (Blount Co.)	\$80,985
Decatur Juvenile Court	\$80,985
Lauderdale Juvenile Court	\$101,305
Sullivan Co. Juvenile Court	\$79,365
Henry Co. Juvenile Court	\$72,270
Dyersburg City Schools	\$101,320
Total	\$516,230

Source: Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, Grant Agreements, 2003.

⁷⁰ Interview with James MacFarlane, Coordinator – Pupil Services Center and John Hall, Manager of the Truancy Assessment Center, March 24, 2003.

⁷¹ William Center, Director of Information Systems, Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, “Re: Data Request,” E-mail to the author, Feb. 11, 2003.

⁷² Bradley County survey response and interview with Referee Michael O’Neil.

⁷³ Interview with James MacFarlane, Coordinator – Pupil Services Center and John Hall, Manager of the Truancy Assessment Center, March 24, 2003.

Interview with John Sorrells, Juvenile Court Truancy Prosecutor, March 23, 2003.

⁷⁴ Interview with Referee Michael O’Neil, Metro Nashville Juvenile Court, Feb. 4, 2003.

⁷⁵ Diane Craver, Department of Children’s Services, “Re: Call,” E-mail to author, July 31, 2003.

⁷⁶ Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, “2001-2002 Annual Report, Building Tennessee’s Future, One Child at a Time,” accessed May 12, 2003, <http://www.state.tn.us/youth>.

The six grant recipients spent an average of about \$450 per student in 2002. Although the agencies undergo an annual review from the Department of Finance and Administration, they do not reapply for the funding nor do they submit to a thorough annual audit or performance evaluation.⁷⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the programs improve the lives of truant children, but the grant agencies do not submit any formal evidence of their accomplishments. Because of recent state budget cuts, the General Assembly considered reducing or eliminating the truancy prevention grants; ultimately, however, the legislature decided to maintain the grants at the previous year's level for 2003.

Departmental Response:

The Commissioner of Education and the Executive Director of the State Board of Education concurred with the report's recommendations. See Appendix G for their letters of response.

⁷⁷ Phone interview with Margaret Dorse, Department of Children's Services, May 13, 2003.

Alternatives

Legislative Alternatives

The General Assembly may wish to amend T.C.A. §49-6-501(a) to reduce the age at which a student can participate in adult high school programs. Because adult high schools offer students an opportunity to earn their degree during nontraditional hours and at their own pace, these alternative education arrangements provide a chance for students who might otherwise drop out of school—Tennessee’s law requires that students be “over sixteen (16) years of age.” Other states allow students to enter into adult high schools when they turn 16 years old. Although this would require adult high schools to monitor attendance to track compulsory education compliance, it may also create more cooperation between adult high schools and traditional schools.

The General Assembly may wish to limit the number of absences that a student can accumulate before he or she must be referred to an attendance officer and/or the judicial system. T.C.A. §49-6-3007 requires superintendents to notify parents after students miss five days without an adequate excuse. However, the law provides no standard for when districts must refer students and their families to attendance officers or the judicial system. Because students fall more behind with each additional absence, encouraging districts to handle truancy cases swiftly may benefit all students.

Administrative Alternatives

The State Board of Education in conjunction with the Department of Education should provide local boards of education with guidelines for developing attendance policies. Stopping short of regulating local school board rules, several states have developed broad guidelines to help districts create effective attendance policies. The Kentucky guidelines ask districts to consider seven components and provide sample language for each component.⁷⁸ The West Virginia guidelines provide more stringent requirements, asking each district to create a policy that includes at least five specific sections.⁷⁹ Although the guidelines do not prescribe exactly how the policies should regulate attendance, they do outline several policy components that need to be articulated. Providing a guideline for local policies will ensure that each district has a comprehensive plan to handle attendance issues.

If the General Assembly chooses to alter the age at which a student can enter adult high school, the State Board of Education should revise Rule 0520-1-2-.05(d) accordingly.

Because of the family’s important role in truancy prevention, the State Board of Education should enhance its parent/family involvement policy and require districts to limit the number of absences that parents can excuse with a note. Following the recommendations of the No Child Left Behind Act and the National PTA Standards, the State Board of Education passed a parent/family involvement policy in January 2003. The policy outlines components of a successful parent involvement program, but offers no guidance on how to develop a program.

⁷⁸ Kentucky Department of Education, Division of School Finance, “Pupil Attendance in Kentucky Schools,” Jan. 2003.

⁷⁹ West Virginia Board of Education Legislative Rule, Title 125, Series 81.

Maryland recently passed a similar policy, but accompanied the list of components with a variety of specific strategies.⁸⁰ One strategy that will help parents prevent truancy problems is to require a doctor's note for most absences. Parent notes have traditionally excused students from school for minor illnesses. However, districts with high absentee rates should consider requiring a doctor's note. Limiting the number of excuses that parents can write may help control the number of forgeries or coerced parent notes.

The BEP Review Committee may wish to consider recommending an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) component to the BEP formula. The Department of Education may also want to consider other incentives (financial or otherwise) for school districts to meet attendance goals. Although other states such as Kentucky use the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rates to calculate school funding, Tennessee uses Average Daily Membership (ADM).⁸¹ Using ADM helps address school systems' fixed costs, but provides no incentive to improve attendance.

A statewide award program provides some financial incentive for schools to achieve the state's attendance goals. In 2000-01, 232 schools qualified for the award, providing them each with \$2,155.17.⁸² This award may not be enough for schools or districts to make a commitment to improving attendance. Therefore, the Department of Education and the BEP Review Committee may need to investigate other ways to provide greater financial incentives for attendance.

In anticipation of the No Child Left Behind ruling on reporting truancy rates, the Department may wish to begin a dialog with districts about reporting unexcused absences. The Department of Education does not require school districts to submit information about unexcused absences because each district has a different set of criteria for classifying unexcused absences. Despite this inconsistency across districts, unexcused absences are the best indicators of truancy. With the No Child Left Behind Act requiring states to report truancy, the Department should begin to consider how to uniformly collect this information.

The Department of Education should include information about truancy prevention and intervention in its Attendance Manual. The current Attendance Manual contains information about reporting and documenting school attendance, but no recommendations on reducing unexcused absences. The Alabama Department of Education provides a similar School Attendance Manual to school districts, but their manual includes a chapter on truancy. The chapter outlines possible disciplinary actions and provides sample forms for schools to use in addressing attendance issues.⁸³ By including information about reducing truancy and regulating unexcused absences, the Department may encourage schools to take a proactive approach to attendance enforcement.

⁸⁰ Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Student and School Services, "Maryland's Plan for Family, School, and Community Involvement: Recommendations for Reaching Academic Success for All Students through Family, School, and Community Partnerships," March 2003.

⁸¹ Phone interview with Evette Perry, Pupil Attendance, Kentucky Department of Education, June 25, 2003.

⁸² Tennessee Department of Education, "Incentive Awards 2000-2001," <http://www.state.tn.us/education/acctincentiveawd.htm>, accessed Aug. 15, 2003.

⁸³ Alabama State Department of Education, *School Attendance Manual*, Bulletin 1999, accessed Aug. 15, 2002, <ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/70/AttendanceManual.pdf>.

The Department of Children’s Services (DCS) should maintain the truancy prevention grants at their current level, but should conduct thorough performance assessments of the grant recipients and possibly open up the program for more applicants. DCS has developed a truancy prevention grant program, but for eight years, the funds have been given to the same six counties with no competition. If the grants remain in the budget, the grant recipients should submit to a performance evaluation and should reapply for the grants on an annual or biannual basis. In the future, the grants should be competitively awarded to allow more systems to benefit from the funding.

The Department of Children’s Services may wish to renew efforts to create additional temporary non-secure facilities for habitual truants who repeatedly appear in the juvenile court system. Tennessee has only one regional Observation and Assessment (O&A) Center, located in Johnson City. Short-term, non-secure housing facilities like the O&A Center provide juvenile court judges with assessments and recommendations that might lead to dispositions other than commitment to state custody. By placing unruly children in these short-term facilities, the Department of Children’s Services might be able to identify services for unruly children to prevent removal from their homes.

To alleviate the recidivism problem for truant children, school districts may need to reduce attendance officers’ caseloads, and increase follow-up services and availability of educational alternatives. Districts may need to hire more attendance officers to decrease the caseload and provide more ongoing services to at-risk students. Programs that follow truant students throughout the school year, like the Henry County Truancy Prevention Program, may help reduce recidivism. Students may also be more likely to stay in school if they have more opportunities to participate in alternative educational programs. Districts may find greater success if they work to tailor schools toward the students’ needs rather than molding the students to meet the school’s needs.

Appendix A

Tennessee State Laws Regulating School Attendance

49-6-3001. School age - Entrance - Attendance - Withdrawal.

(a) The public schools shall be free to all persons above the age of five (5) years, or who will become five (5) years of age on or before September 30, residing within the state.

(b) (1) Any child residing within the state who is five (5) years of age or who will become five (5) years of age on or before September 30 may enter at the beginning of the term the public school designated by the local board of education having appropriate jurisdiction; provided, that such child enters within thirty (30) days after the opening day of the term.

(2) Any child who will not become five (5) years of age until after December 31 shall not enter school during that school year; provided, that school systems having semiannual promotions may admit at the beginning of any semester children who will become five (5) years of age within sixty (60) days following the opening of the semester.

(3) Where a pupil meets the requirements of the state board of education for transfer and/or admission purposes, as determined by the commissioner of education, such pupil may be admitted by a local board of education, notwithstanding any other provision or act to the contrary.

(c) (1) Every parent, guardian or other legal custodian residing within this state having control or charge of any child or children between six (6) years of age and seventeen (17) years of age, both inclusive, shall cause such child or children to attend public or non-public school, and in event of failure to do so, shall be subject to the penalties hereinafter provided. The LEA in which a transfer student seeks to enroll may require disclosure and copies of the student's records in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (12 USC § 1232g et seq.), including, but not limited to, disciplinary records from educational agencies where the student was previously enrolled.

(2) The provisions of subdivision (c)(1) do not apply to any child who:

(A) Has received a diploma or other certificate of graduation issued to the person from a secondary high school of this state or any other state;

(B) Is enrolled and making satisfactory progress in a course leading to a general educational development certificate (GED) from a state-approved institution or organization, or who has obtained such certificate. Any institution or organization which enrolls a child who is under eighteen (18) years of age shall provide a report to the local board of education at least three (3) times each year relative to the progress of all such persons under eighteen (18) years of age. If the local board of education determines any child under eighteen (18) years of age is not making satisfactory progress, then such child shall be subject to the provisions of subdivision (c)(1);

(C) Is six (6) years of age or younger and whose parent or guardian has filed a notice of intent to conduct a home school with the director of the LEA or with the director of a church-related school; or

(D) A student enrolled in a home school who has reached seventeen (17) years of age.

(3) For the purposes of this part, "public school" and "non-public school" are defined as follows:

(A) "Non-public school" means a church-related school, home school or private school;

(i) "Church-related school" means a school as defined in § 49-50-801;

(ii) "Home school" means a school as defined in § 49-6-3050; and

(iii) "Private school" means a school accredited by, or a member of, an organization or association approved by the state board of education as an organization accrediting or setting academic requirements in schools, or which has been approved by the state, or is in the future approved by the commissioner in accordance with rules promulgated by the state board of education; and

(B) "Public school" means any school operated by an LEA or by the state with public funds.

(4) A parent or guardian with any good and substantial reason as determined by such parent or other person having legal custody of a child, and agreed to by the respective local board of education, may withdraw such parent or other person's child from a public school; provided, that within thirty (30) days the parent or person having legal custody of the child places the child in a public school designated by such local board of education, or in a non-public school, as herein defined.

(5) A parent or guardian who believes that such parent's or guardian's child is not ready to attend school at the designated age of mandatory attendance may make application to the principal of the public school which the child would attend for a one (1) semester or one (1) year deferral in required attendance. Any such deferral shall be reported to the director of the LEA by the principal.

49-6-3009. Penalty for violations.

(a) Any parent, guardian or other person who has control of a child, or children, and who violates the provisions of this part commits a Class C misdemeanor.

(b) Each day's unlawful absence constitutes a separate offense.

Appendix B Individuals Interviewed

Nikita Baskerville, Attendance Officer
Metro Nashville School District
Nashville, TN

Kimberly Buck, Office of Curriculum and
Instruction
Department of Education
Nashville, TN

Charles Cate, Attendance Supervisor
Henry County Truancy Prevention Program
Paris, TN

Jennifer Childers-Curry, Guidance Counselor
Montgomery County Schools
Clarksville, TN

Margaret Dorse, Director of Fiscal Services
Department of Children's Services
Nashville, TN

Anjanette Eash, Youth Court Coordinator
Tennessee Bar Association
Nashville, TN

John Hall, Manager
Truancy Assessment Center
Memphis, TN

Donnie Jordan, Director of Special Programs
Department of Education
Nashville, TN

Lisa Knight, Driver Control Manager
Department of Safety
Nashville, TN

James MacFarlane, Coordinator
Pupil Services, Memphis City Schools
Memphis, TN

Bobbi McGarity
Knoxville School District
Knoxville, TN

Janet Neilson, Director of Court Services
TN Council of Juvenile and Family Court
Judges
Nashville, TN

Michael O'Neil, Juvenile Court Referee
Metro Nashville Juvenile Court
Nashville, TN

Evette Perry, Pupil Attendance
Kentucky Department of Education
Louisville, KY

John Sorrells, Truancy Prosecutor
Memphis Juvenile Court
Memphis, TN

Jimmie Thacker, Executive Director
International Association for Truancy and
Dropout Prevention
Knoxville, TN

Deborah Thomas, Statistical Analyst
Tennessee Department of Education
Nashville, TN

Elfreda Tyler, Director of Finance Research
Tennessee Department of Education
Nashville, TN

Appendix C Attendance Personnel Survey

Please use the attached envelope or fax your completed survey to the Office of Education Accountability at (615) 532-9237 by May 2, 2003. We appreciate your cooperation.

For the purpose of this survey, **truancy** refers to an absence for an entire school day, a major portion of the school day or the major portion of any class, study hall or activity during the school day for which the student is scheduled.

I. General

1. Name: _____ Phone: _____

School District: _____

Address: _____

Please check the box if you would like to receive a copy of the final truancy report

2. How many attendance officers work in your district(s)? _____

3. How long have you been in your current position? _____

4. Did you receive job-related training when you began as an attendance officer? YES NO
If yes, what type of training did you receive? _____

Who provided the training? _____

5. Do you receive any ongoing professional development or training related to attendance or truancy? YES NO

If yes, what type of training do you receive? _____

How often do you receive training? _____

Who provides the training? _____

6. How many schools do you supervise?

High schools _____ Middle schools _____ Elementary schools _____ Others _____

7. Does the school district use a software program to track attendance? YES NO

If yes, what is the name of the software? _____

8. Do you consider truancy to be a serious problem in your school district? YES NO
 Please explain. _____

II. Referral Information

9. Who refers students to you? (mark all that apply) ___ teachers ___ principal/vice principal
 ___ superintendent ___ school board ___ school attendance clerk ___ police
 ___ juvenile court ___ other _____

10. On average, how many referrals do you receive per month? _____

11. What percentage of referrals come from the following sources? _____ teachers
 ___ other school officials ___ police ___ juvenile court ___ other _____

12. Do you feel that your case load is (circle one) too large just right too small

13. What is the **minimum** number of unexcused absences that students must have to be referred to you? _____

14. On average, how many unexcused absences have students accumulated before they are referred to you? _____

15. Can you access student records when dealing with a truancy case? YES NO
 Please explain what type of access you have to these records. _____

III. Other Agencies

16. Please rate your relationship with the following entities on matters related to attendance.

a. Juvenile Court:

Highly cooperative Cooperative Less than cooperative No relationship

b. Local Police/Sheriff's Department:

Highly cooperative Cooperative Less than cooperative No relationship

c. Local Board of Education

Highly cooperative Cooperative Less than cooperative No relationship

d. TN Department of Education

Highly cooperative Cooperative Less than cooperative No relationship

Please include any additional comments that you have about your relationship with any of the entities listed above.

IV. Case Outcomes

17. In what percentage of cases do you attempt to contact a student's guardians? _____

18. What are the steps you take to contact a student's guardians? _____

21. In what percentage of cases do you attempt to make a home visit? _____

22. Estimate the percentage of cases that you investigate in which the contact information for the guardian is incorrect. _____

23. What percentage of students are referred to you more than once per year? _____

24. On average, how long does it take to resolve a case? _____

25. What type of follow-up services can students and families receive after you have contacted the guardians? _____

V. Other

26. Do you provide or participate in any truancy prevention programs for your school district?
YES NO

Please explain. _____

27. Do you know of any grants that your school district has received to improve attendance?
YES NO

If yes, please explain. _____

28. What are the most common reasons for truancy in your school district? _____

29. Does your school system have any policies or practices regarding attendance that you think are effective? YES NO

If yes, please describe. _____

30. Please describe any policy changes that you believe your school district could make to improve student attendance? _____

31. Please use the back of this survey to add any additional comments about truancy.

Please attach a copy of your school district's school board rules or any other policies relating to attendance.

Please complete and return this survey by May 2, 2003. You may fax the survey and attendance rules to the Office of Education Accountability, Attn: Alisa Palmisano at (615) 532-9237. You may also return the survey in the enclosed business reply envelope to the following address:

Comptroller of the Treasury
Division of State Audit
James K. Polk State Office Building
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1500
Nashville, Tennessee 37219-9938

If you have any questions about the survey, please call Alisa Palmisano, Office of Education Accountability at (615) 401-7881.

Appendix D Attendance Personnel Survey Respondents

Alamo City	Etowah City	Lawrence County	Roane County
Anderson County	Fayette County	Lenoir City	Robertson County
Bedford County	Fayetteville City	Lewis County	Rogersville City
Bells City	Fentress County	Lincoln County	Rutherford County
Benton County	Franklin County	Loudon County	South Carroll County
Blount County	Franklin Special	Macon County	Sequatchie County
Bradley County	Gibson County	Manchester City	Smith County
Bristol City	Giles County	Marshall County	Stewart County
Campbell County	Grainger County	Maury County	Sumner County
Cannon County	Greene County	McKenzie Special	Sweetwater City
Carter County	Hamblen County	McMinn County	Tipton County
Cheatham County	Hardeman County	McNairy County	Trenton Special
Chester County	Harriman City	Memphis City	Trousdale County
Claiborne County	Haywood County	Milan Special	Unicoi County
Clay County	Henderson County	Monroe County	Union City
Cleveland City	Henry County	Moore County	Van Buren County
Clinton City	Hickman County	Morgan County	Warren County
Cocke County	Houston County	Murfreesboro City	Washington County
Coffee County	Huntingdon Special	Obion County	Wayne County
Crockett County	Jackson County	Oneida Special	Weakley County
Cumberland County	Jackson - Madison Co	Overton County	West Carroll Special
Davidson County	Johnson City	Paris Special	Williamson County
Dayton City	Kingsport City Schools	Perry County	Wilson County
Dickson County	Knox County	Polk County	
Dyer County	Lake County	Putnam County	
Elizabethton City	Lauderdale County	Rhea County	

Non-respondents

Alcoa	Greeneville	Jefferson County	Pickett County
Athens	Grundy County	Johnson County	Richard City
Bledsoe County	H. Rock Bruceton	Lebanon	Scott County
Bradford	Hamilton County	Lexington	Sevier County
Carroll County	Hancock County	Marion County	Shelby County
Covington	Hardin County	Maryville	Sullivan County
Decatur County	Hawkins County	Montgomery County	Tullahoma
Dekalb County	Humboldt	Newport	Union County
Dyersburg	Humphreys County	Oak Ridge	White County

Appendix E District Attendance Policy Components

District	Defines Truancy	Defines Excused Absences	Explains Driver's License Law	Outlines Makeup Policy for Unexcused Absences	Specifies Tardy Policy	Describes Review Board or Committee	Describes Attendance Incentives	Specifies # of Unexcused Absences before		
								Notifying Parents	Notifying Court	Losing Credit or Failing Grade Level
Alamo	X	X		X		X		X	X	X
Alcoa					X	X	X	X		X
Anderson Co.	X	X			X	X		X	X	
Athens	X	X		X			X			
Bedford Co.	X	X	X			X		X		X
Bells			N/A			X				X
Benton Co.						X	X			X
Bledsoe Co.	X	X	X	X		X				
Blount Co.	X	X	X			X				X
Bradford	X	X			X	X		X		
Bradley Co.	X	X	X				X	X		
Bristol		X		X						
Campbell Co.		X				X		X	X	X
Cannon Co.	X	X	X			X		X		X
Carroll Co.		X			X					
Carter Co.	X	X	X			X		X		X
Cheatham Co.	X	X		X	X		X	X		X
Chester Co.		X			X		X			
Claiborne Co.		X				X		X	X	
Clay Co.	X	X	X	X		X	X			X
Cleveland	X	X	X			X		X		X
Clinton		X				X		X		
Cocke Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Coffee Co.		X	X		X	X		X	X	
Covington	MERGING WITH TIPTON COUNTY AS OF 06/30									
Crockett Co.		X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Cumberland Co.	X	X		X	X	X	X			

District	Defines Truancy	Defines Excused Absences	Explains Driver's License Law	Outlines Makeup Policy for Unexcused Absences	Specifies Tardy Policy	Describes Review Board or Committee	Describes Attendance Incentives	Specifies # of Unexcused Absences before		
								Notifying Parents	Notifying Court	Losing Credit or Failing Grade Level
Davidson Co.		X		X	X				X	
Dayton		X		X	X				X	
Decatur Co.	X	X		X	X	X		X		
Dekalb Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Dickson Co.	X	X		X		X		X	X	X
Dyer Co.	X	X	X	X	X					
Dyersburg	X	X	X	X						
Elizabethton				X				X	X	
Etowah		X	N/A		X					X
Fayette Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Fayetteville								X		
Fentress Co.										
Franklin	X	X	X			X		X	X	
Franklin Co.				X		X		X		X
Gibson Co Sp	X	X				X		X		
Giles Co.		X		X	X		X	X		X
Grainger Co.		X	X	X						
Greene Co.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
Greeneville	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Grundy Co.				X	X	X		X		X
H Rock Bruceton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hamblen Co.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hamilton Co.		X			X	X		X	X	X
Hancock Co.	X	X	X	X		X				X
Hardeman Co.	X	X	X			X		X	X	X
Hardin Co.	X	X	X	X		X		X		
Harriman		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Hawkins Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Haywood Co.		X		X		X		X		X
Henderson Co.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Henry Co.				X	X	X	X	X		X

District	Defines Truancy	Defines Excused Absences	Explains Driver's License Law	Outlines Makeup Policy for Unexcused Absences	Specifies Tardy Policy	Describes Review Board or Committee	Describes Attendance Incentives	Specifies # of Unexcused Absences before		
								Notifying Parents	Notifying Court	Losing Credit or Failing Grade Level
Hickman Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Houston Co.		X		X	X			X		
Humboldt	X	X	X	X		X		X		
Humphreys Co.		X				X	X			X
Huntingdon	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Jackson Co.						X			X	
Jefferson Co.		X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Johnson City	X	X	X		X	X		X		X
Johnson Co.	X	X	X			X			X	X
Kingsport				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Knox Co.	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
Lake Co.	X		X	X			X		X	
Lauderdale Co.		X	X			X			X	X
Lawrence Co.					X		X			X
Lebanon		X		X						X
Lenoir City		X	X		X	X		X		X
Lewis Co.	X	X	X	X	X					
Lexington	COULD NOT BE REACHED									
Lincoln Co.	X	X	X			X		X	X	X
Loudon Co.	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
Macon Co.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Madison Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Manchester	X	X	N/A	X				X		
Marion Co.		X			X	X		X		X
Marshall Co.	X	X	X		X	X		X		X
Maryville						X				
Maury Co.	X	X	X	X					X	
Mckenzie	X	X	X			X		X		
Mcminn Co.	X	X	X			X				
Mcnaury Co.	X	X	X	X			X		X	
Meigs Co.	X	X	X	X						

District	Defines Truancy	Defines Excused Absences	Explains Driver's License Law	Outlines Makeup Policy for Unexcused Absences	Specifies Tardy Policy	Describes Review Board or Committee	Describes Attendance Incentives	Specifies # of Unexcused Absences before		
								Notifying Parents	Notifying Court	Losing Credit or Failing Grade Level
Memphis		X		X				X	X	
Milan	X	X		X	X	X		X		X
Monroe Co.	X	X	X			X		X	X	X
Montgomery Co.										
Moore Co.					X			X		X
Morgan Co.		X		X		X		X	X	
Murfreesboro		X						X	X	
Newport	X	X			X	X		X		X
Oak Ridge				X						
Obion Co.	X	X			X			X		
Oneida	X	X	X			X				X
Overton Co.	X	X	X	X		X				
Paris	X	X		X		X		X		
Perry Co.				X	X			X		X
Pickett Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Polk Co.	X	X	X	X		X				
Putnam Co.	X	X	X			X				
Rhea Co.		X				X	X	X		X
Richard City		X		X			X		X	X
Roane Co.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Robertson Co.	X	X	X	X		X			X	X
Rogersville					X			X	X	X
Rutherford Co.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Scott Co.	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
Sequatchie Co.	X	X	X	X		X		X		
Sevier Co.	X	X	X	X	X			X		
Shelby Co.	X	X						X		
Smith Co.		X	X			X				X
South Carroll	X	X		X	X			X		
Stewart Co.	X	X	X	X	X					X
Sullivan Co.		X				X		X	X	X

District	Defines Truancy	Defines Excused Absences	Explains Driver's License Law	Outlines Makeup Policy for Unexcused Absences	Specifies Tardy Policy	Describes Review Board or Committee	Describes Attendance Incentives	Specifies # of Unexcused Absences before		
								Notifying Parents	Notifying Court	Losing Credit or Failing Grade Level
Sumner Co.		X	X			X				X
Sweetwater		X	N/A					X	X	
Tipton Co.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Trenton	X									
Trousdale Co.	X	X	X	X						X
Tulahoma	COULD NOT BE REACHED									
Unicoi Co.		X	X			X	X	X		
Union City		X		X		X		X		X
Union Co.	X	X	X	X		X				X
Van Buren Co.	X	X	X						X	X
Warren Co.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Washington Co.	X	X	X	X				X		X
Wayne Co.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Weakley Co.	X	X			X			X	X	X
West Carroll Sp	COULD NOT BE REACHED									
White Co.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Williamson Co.	X	X	X					X	X	
Wilson Co.		X	X				X	X	X	

Source: OEA collection of local Board of Education attendance rules, June 2003.

Appendix F Truancy Juvenile Court Referrals

	2001 Number of Truancy Referrals	2001 Total Number of Referrals for All Reasons	% of Total Referrals with Truancy	2001 Census Estimate Age 5 - 17	2001 # of Individual Children with Truancy	% of Population Age 5 - 17 with Truancy
Anderson	20	1,449	1.38%	12,691	20	0.16%
Bedford	34	1,368	2.49%	6,762	29	0.43%
Benton	18	229	7.86%	2,882	18	0.62%
Bledsoe	65	449	14.48%	2,056	59	2.87%
Blount	59	2,254	2.62%	17,724	53	0.30%
Bradley	430	2,927	14.69%	15,302	257	1.68%
Campbell	189	499	37.88%	7,526	189	2.51%
Cannon ****	4	250	1.60%	2,347	3	0.13%
Carroll ****	8	339	2.36%	5,298	6	0.11%
Carter	160	1,068	14.98%	8,800	147	1.67%
Cheatham	60	993	6.04%	7,490	60	0.80%
Chester	13	175	7.43%	2,712	13	0.48%
Claiborne	25	643	3.89%	5,847	25	0.43%
Clay	13	365	3.56%	1,324	11	0.83%
Cocke	161	1,498	10.75%	5,902	142	2.41%
Coffee	63	708	8.90%	8,763	57	0.65%
Crockett	15	198	7.58%	2,686	11	0.41%
Cumberland	50	800	6.25%	7,693	46	0.60%
Davidson	183	22,902	0.80%	87,289	182	0.21%
Decatur	10	136	7.35%	1,933	10	0.52%
DeKalb	55	400	13.75%	2,993	53	1.77%
Dickson	55	1,017	5.41%	8,846	55	0.62%
Dyer	76	836	9.09%	7,270	75	1.03%
Fayette	20	361	5.54%	7,319	20	0.27%
Fentress	27	222	12.16%	3,268	27	0.83%
Franklin	55	698	7.88%	6,910	53	0.77%
Gibson	139	1,600	8.69%	8,801	86	0.98%
Giles	25	849	2.94%	5,487	18	0.33%
Grainger	18	556	3.24%	3,755	18	0.48%
Greene	75	1,200	6.25%	10,429	73	0.70%
Grundy	68	881	7.72%	3,039	64	2.11%
Hamblen	167	1,848	9.04%	9,578	127	1.33%
Hamilton	444	5,539	8.02%	52,562	403	0.77%
Hancock	4	38	10.53%	1,317	4	0.30%
Hardeman	5	758	0.66%	5,339	5	0.09%
Hardin	118	573	20.59%	4,727	64	1.35%
Hawkins	84	1,642	5.12%	8,916	81	0.91%
Haywood	17	668	2.54%	4,545	16	0.35%
Henderson	188	985	19.09%	4,714	173	3.67%
Henry	31	486	6.38%	5,287	30	0.57%
Hickman ****	7	385	1.82%	3,843	7	0.18%
Houston	10	246	4.07%	1,476	10	0.68%
Humphreys	22	444	4.95%	3,261	18	0.55%

	2001 Number of Truancy Referrals	2001 Total Number of Referral Reasons	% of Total Referrals with Truancy	2001 Census Estimate Age 5 - 17	2001 # of Individual Children with Truancy	% of Population Age 5 - 17 with Truancy
Jackson ****	1	190	0.53%	1,698	1	0.06%
Jefferson	81	1,784	4.54%	7,565	77	1.02%
Johnson	12	168	7.14%	2,756	12	0.44%
Knox	41	5,923	0.69%	62,142	37	0.06%
Lake ****	3	122	2.46%	1,121	2	0.18%
Lauderdale	139	1,538	9.04%	5,187	126	2.43%
Lawrence	23	781	2.94%	7,637	22	0.29%
Lewis ****	1	181	0.55%	2,356	1	0.04%
Lincoln ****	1	340	0.29%	5,531	1	0.02%
Loudon	272	1,185	22.95%	6,807	193	2.84%
Macon	64	768	8.33%	3,544	53	1.50%
Madison ****	0	1,052	0.00%	17,373	0	0.00%
Marion	21	435	4.83%	5,335	21	0.39%
Marshall	57	827	6.89%	5,257	47	0.89%
Maury	237	2,880	8.23%	13,988	157	1.12%
McMinn	31	772	4.02%	8,635	30	0.35%
McNairy	112	548	20.44%	4,540	112	2.47%
Meigs	23	152	15.13%	1,974	21	1.06%
Monroe	29	825	3.52%	6,843	27	0.39%
Montgomery	203	3,065	6.62%	25,025	178	0.71%
Moore	4	44	9.09%	1,013	2	0.20%
Morgan	13	202	6.44%	3,720	13	0.35%
Obion	41	587	6.98%	6,247	38	0.61%
Overton	3	100	3.00%	3,683	3	0.08%
Perry ****	0	258	0.00%	1,373	0	0.00%
Pickett ****	2	68	2.94%	877	2	0.23%
Polk	10	73	13.70%	2,776	9	0.32%
Putnam	44	1,837	2.40%	9,922	43	0.43%
Rhea	102	655	15.57%	5,429	82	1.51%
Roane	69	304	22.70%	8,793	63	0.72%
Robertson	51	4,273	1.19%	11,272	51	0.45%
Rutherford	166	1,957	8.48%	35,055	159	0.45%
Scott	64	326	19.63%	4,606	54	1.17%
Sequatchie	14	125	11.20%	2,118	14	0.66%
Sevier	249	4,170	5.97%	11,753	192	1.63%
Shelby	1,521	29,324	5.19%	177,854	1,270	0.71%
Smith	21	131	16.03%	3,160	19	0.60%
Stewart	15	270	5.56%	2,072	14	0.68%
Sullivan *	154	3,727	4.13%	24,673	126	0.51%
Sumner	250	5,822	4.29%	26,026	221	0.85%
Tipton	72	553	13.02%	11,059	69	0.62%
Trousdale	5	205	2.44%	1,355	5	0.37%
Unicoi	31	272	11.40%	2,832	27	0.95%
Union	66	410	16.10%	3,345	65	1.94%
Van Buren	4	51	7.84%	990	2	0.20%
Warren	249	1,515	16.44%	6,920	221	3.19%
Washington	152	4,119	3.69%	16,799	103	0.61%
Wayne	73	559	13.06%	2,920	66	2.26%

	2001 Number of Truancy Referrals	2001 Total Number of Referral Reasons	% of Total Referrals with Truancy	2001 Census Estimate Age 5 - 17	2001 # of Individual Children with Truancy	% of Population Age 5 - 17 with Truancy
Weakley	34	461	7.38%	5,570	29	0.52%
White	15	381	3.94%	4,136	13	0.31%
Williamson	282	6,923	4.07%	26,803	115	0.43%
Wilson	132	1,861	7.09%	17,812	120	0.67%
Total:	8,549	156,581		1,410,993	7146	

Note: This data only reflects the truancy cases that are referred to Juvenile Courts and have been disposed by the Court and received by the Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Schools also handle truancy cases and may not refer these to the Juvenile Court.

* This total includes Sullivan Division I, Sullivan Division II and Bristol City Juvenile Court

** This total includes Washington County and Johnson City Juvenile Courts.

*** These counties had suspicious Truancy and Referral totals and have been adjusted after reviewing their data.

**** These counties have questionable data with regard to truancy totals reported to the Council.

Source: Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Truancy by County and Census Estimates Age 5-17 for Alisa Palmisano, 2001.

Appendix G

Responses from the Commissioner of Education and the Executive Director of the State Board of Education



PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
6TH FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.
COMMISSIONER

December 15, 2003

Ms. Ethel R. Detch, Director
Offices of Research and Education Accountability
Comptroller of the Treasury
Suite 1700, James K. Polk Building
Nashville, TN 37243-0268

Dear Ms. Detch:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your recent report on truancy. We concur with the alternatives that you have posed and know that they will stimulate much discussion.

Thank you for the time and effort that was put into this report. It will provide needed information to both school systems and policy makers of Tennessee.
We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lana C. Seivers".

Lana C. Seivers, Ed.D.
Commissioner



STATE OF TENNESSEE

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

PHIL BREDESEN
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DR. DOUGLAS E. WOOD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

January 9, 2004

Dear Ms. Detch:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the report regarding the issue of truancy in Tennessee schools. As you are aware, the State Board of Education takes the reports from your office seriously and we have worked hard to implement administrative alternatives from previous reports.

The State Board concurs with the recommendations from the report. As you are aware, the Board has worked aggressively to promote parental involvement. In January of 2003, the Board passed a parental involvement policy and we will continue to work with the Tennessee Congress of Parents and Teachers who endorsed our policy to improve upon it.

With regard to attendance, the Board has included attendance as a performance goal in the Board's *Performance Model*. In addition, the Board outlined specific guidelines for the development of attendance policies for school systems in our rules and regulations prior to the passage of the Education Improvement Act of 1992. Consistent with the law, we gave local school systems more autonomy in the development of policies at the local level.

We look forward to working with the Department and the General Assembly in the development of more specific guidelines.

Sincerely,

Douglas E. Wood, Ed.D.
Executive Director

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◆Ethel Detch

Assistant Director (Research)

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◆indicates staff who assisted with this project