

Schuylkill County Truancy Handbook for Parents and Youth

The following is information that every family should be aware of regarding truancy and how truant situations will be handled for the 2010/11 school term:

Initially it is important to know that by definition compulsory school attendance is from ages 8-17. However if a student under the age of 8 is enrolled and attending school, they are also bound to follow the truancy policy once they begin school.

- A.) Upon a student missing one (1) illegal day of school, a representative from the district will attempt a face to face contact with the family and ensure they are provided with a copy of the County Truancy Policy.
- B.) Upon the youth accumulating a total of three (3) illegal days of school the district shall make a verbal referral to the Schuylkill County Children and Youth Office. Following the verbal referral being completed, the school shall fax a copy of the student attendance record to the agency. The agency will begin tracking the attendance upon receipt of the initial referral; this will include calls to the school at least two (2) days per week to ensure the youth is attending.
- C.) Within five (5) business days of the verbal referral the agency will conduct a home visit and verbally review the County Truancy Policy. Following this meeting the agency will continue to track the child's attendance for an additional 90 school days. Within 10 days of the verbal referral, the caseworker will schedule a Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) meeting. This meeting will be coordinated between the family, truant youth, school district and the C&Y agency. Information regarding the time and date of the meeting will also be provided to the school based probation officer and any service providers involved with the family.
- D.) The TEP meeting will be held to discuss issues leading to the truancy and plans to correct the behavior. The agency will provide the family with a verbal and written explanation of the truancy policy and the sanctions that can be placed upon the family and youth if this policy is violated. Services and programs available within the community, agency, and school setting can be discussed as options during this meeting. Children and Youth will complete the Truancy Elimination Plan and will provide a copy to the participants at the meeting. This Plan should be revisited throughout the involvement with the youth and family and revised as needed.
- E.) If the youth misses one (1) illegal day following the development of the TEP, the school district shall file a citation with the Magisterial District Justice. The school district shall provide a copy of this citation to the C&Y caseworker and the Juvenile Justice Department. Children and Youth will make every effort to have a representative present at the Magistrate hearing, when scheduled. Subsequent citations to the Magisterial District Justice should be filed following any additional absences.
- F.) Upon the filing of the first citation Children and Youth will file a dependency petition and request that the case be fast tracked to Truancy Court. A school

- representative will be subpoenaed and to testify to the involvement with the youth. Services and options shall be presented during this hearing and the agency shall request the court order the family's participation.
- G.) If the student misses three (3) illegal days following the issuance of the dependency order, a review hearing will be scheduled and alternative options, including placement in a weekend program will be explored. If a placement order for the weekend program is granted the school will be requested to provide applicable work to be completed.
- H.) If at anytime during the process the family/student becomes uncooperative the agency will petition the court for a court order to participate in services.

At a minimum the family will have monthly in home contact with the C&Y caseworker.

Services that can/will be offered and utilized in an attempt to eliminate truant behavior are:

- Family Group Decision Making (FGDM): This program is contracted through the Children and Youth Office, however is handled by a private agency. The concept of FGDM is to bring family members, friends, and social supports together in order to develop a working plan to resolve the truancy issues.
- Family Support Unit/Signature Family Services: Both services are contracted through the Children and Youth office and provide in home parenting and counseling services.
- Access Rebound Program: This program is offered through both C&Y office and JPO and will provide a one on one mentor and can offer in home services to the family. This program will also have a family advocate that can work with the youth and family when dealing with educational obstacles.
- Day Treatment/Alternative Education: The Intermediate Unit, in conjunction with the C&Y office, offers a full time alternative education program for students who may have difficulty in the large school setting.
- Student Assistance Program (SAP): Each school district has a SAP team comprised of school personnel and community providers that can offer assistance to a youth in the school setting.

Penalties for Violation of Compulsory School Attendance:

The Penalties can include both the student and the parent/guardian

- Citations issued through the Magisterial District Justice Office. The citations can be issued to both the student and the parent. The fines can be no more than \$300 per offense. The truancy committee will be encouraging the local magistrates to impose the highest amount possible. In addition, if the parents are issued a fine and they fail to pay the fine, the Magistrate can impose a jail sentence, not to exceed five (5) days.
- Community Service can be ordered by the District Magistrate for both the parent and truant youth. The community service should be completed at the school, if available.
- Suspension of driving privileges for the truant student. Upon a first conviction the child's operating privilege for operating an automobile will be suspended for 90 days. Upon a second or subsequent conviction, the child's operating privileges will be suspended for six (6) months. Children who do not yet have a driver's license will be ineligible to apply for a license for the time periods of 90 days for the first conviction and six months for the second and any subsequent conviction.
- Loss or suspension of cash assistance benefits, as per the United States Code Title 42 – The Public Health & Welfare. The State may reduce, by such amount as the State considers appropriate, the amount of assistance otherwise payable under the State program to a family. The Children and Youth agency will be working with the local Department of Public Welfare in order to ensure the benefits are withheld.
- Once a youth is adjudicated dependent and attempts at engaging the child in a school program fail the agency can recommend to the Court a weekend placement program. This program can be utilized for one weekend or as many as needed in order to encourage the student to attend school regularly. Students who are court ordered into a weekend placement program will be required to complete assignments provided by the school. In addition the youth will complete chores and any physical requirements of the program.