



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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Report Summary in response to 2014 House Resolution 1032

Truancy and School Dropout Prevention: Report of the Truancy Advisory Committee

<p>The Joint State Government Commission assembled an Advisory Committee that was directed to complete a study on truancy and school dropout prevention that included the following:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thorough and comprehensive study of current truancy law and policies • Barriers and best practices regarding education success and stability • Court competencies • Data collection • Measurement of educational outcomes for children in foster care • Statutes, best practices, and legislative initiatives in other states • Studies or initiatives promoted by national educational advocacy organizations relating to truancy • The manner in which charter and cyber charter schools enforce Pennsylvania’s truancy laws and impediments to enforcement
<p>The recommendations address several areas in particular: creating more uniformity in the definitions and procedures schools must use to implement compulsory school attendance, improving flexibility in the disposition of truant children by both schools and courts, taking into consideration their individual needs and the appropriateness of particular sanctions, and improving data collection to help identify at-risk students and provide schools, courts, and children and youth agencies with early intervention and prevention opportunities to promote educational success.</p>	
<p>Statutory Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the beginning compulsory attendance age from 8 years of age to 6 years of age to bring Pennsylvania in line with the rest of the country and provide younger students with the advantage of beginning their formal education at the same time as the rest of their peers. • Provide a standardized definition of “truant” and “habitually truant” that is applicable to all Pennsylvania schools. • Standardize truancy policies for charter and cyber charter schools and allow them to develop those policies independent of the local school district and to report truanancies directly to the Department of Education. • Clarify truancy procedures, from notice requirements to determining when a case should be referred to the local children and youth agency or the magisterial district judge. • Require schools to offer families a student attendance improvement conference before beginning legal proceedings against the student or the parent. • Organize and clarify the compulsory attendance enforcement procedures to ensure that all potential penalties are optional, allowing magisterial district judges’ discretion in enforcing compliance.
<p>Public Policy Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Pennsylvania Department of Education should serve as a resource for guidance and training to deal with truancy issues. • Good data collection systems should be in place to help identify areas of need and ensure that appropriate resources and support are available. • Consistent with State and federal privacy laws, data should be shared among and between schools, children and youth agencies, courts, probation, and other relevant entities to help identify children at risk and coordinate services to them. • The Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, should develop detailed data regarding educational outcomes for children in foster care. • The Department of Education and schools, as well as the Department of Human Services, should ensure that training is available to school personnel and children and youth caseworkers in truancy prevention and attendance improvement. • School-based services, especially evidence-based programs, should be available to assist children with compliance issues. This includes allowing truancy hearings to occur in schools, at the discretion of the magisterial district judge and the school superintendent.

The full report is available on our website, <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>