



# Stop Truancy Before it Starts: Getting every kid to school, everyday

A Truancy Prevention & Early Intervention Policy Brief  
March 2017

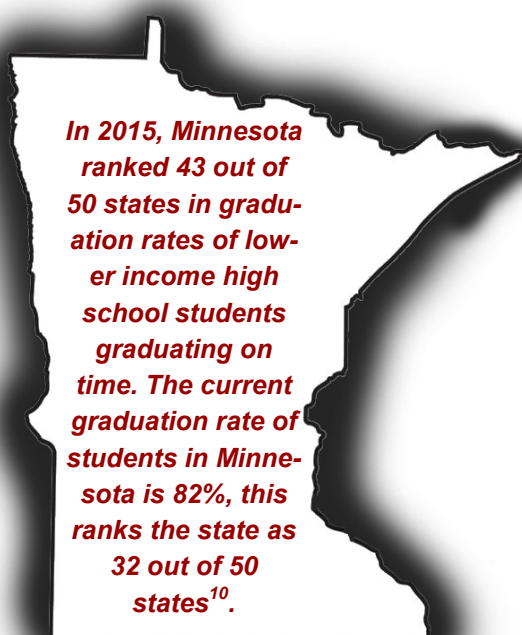
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## Executive Summary

Attending school consistently builds a foundation for academic achievement and social success in the future.<sup>15</sup> Students missing an excessive number of school days throughout childhood for any reason experience increasingly negative outcomes as they grow older. When truancy leads to dropping out of school, this costs individuals money in lost wages associated with reduced education levels. Truancy also costs society as a whole in reduced tax collection, increased crime, and increased need for public services.<sup>1</sup> Research demonstrates that minority students and youth with other risk-factors are more likely to experience school disengagement leading to truancy.<sup>11</sup> Punitive school policies such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion can also lead to a snowball effect of getting behind on schoolwork and missing more school.<sup>2</sup> Several highly effective evidence-based truancy intervention models are outlined in this brief. Early identification and intervention becomes a crucial strategy for effectively reducing absenteeism that in turn increases graduation rates. The State of Minnesota can reduce truancy rates and improve long-term outcomes for students by adopting an array of strategies, including increasing the number of school social workers and other support personnel, funding mental health services in schools, developing state-wide tracking of attendance, and state mandated early truancy intervention.



*In 2015, Minnesota ranked 43 out of 50 states in graduation rates of lower income high school students graduating on time. The current graduation rate of students in Minnesota is 82%, this ranks the state as 32 out of 50 states<sup>10</sup>.*

### THE PROBLEM

- ◆ Truancy is caused by many different factors including mental health, physical health, poverty, suspensions, homelessness<sup>6</sup>, unreliable transportation, dysfunctional family functioning, unhealthy housing<sup>2</sup>, trauma, substance abuse, and embarrassment at being behind.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ High numbers of school absences for any reason correlate with disengagement from school, reduced learning, lower grades, decreased graduation rates, and an increased chance of dropping out. Truant youth are found to be more likely to struggle with ADHD, have a mental health diagnosis, or have been exposed to trauma or chronic stress, at greater risk for poor health, and lower lifetime earnings<sup>5,10</sup>.
- ◆ The consequences of truancy remain far-reaching for youth who become disconnected from school and for the entire community. Excessive school absenteeism and truancy is correlated with high unemployment, underemployment, and an increase in reliance on public assistance<sup>14</sup>. The average high school dropout costs society more than \$800,000 over the course of their lifetime<sup>1</sup>. Truant youth remain much more likely to engage in other delinquent behavior and to enter the juvenile justice system and prison<sup>5,10</sup>. One study found that nearly 44% of all the prisoners in the United States did not graduate from high school.<sup>9</sup>

## ▣ School Attendance: It's the Law! ▣

Minn. State Statute requires children to attend school. Truancy is in violation of Minnesota state law.

- ◆ Minn. State. 120.2, subd.5: Every child between the ages of 7 and 17 must attend school unless he/she has graduated. Every child under the age of 7 shall receive instruction.
- ◆ Minn. Stat. 120A.22, subd.8: A student who is 17 must attend school unless the student is formally withdrawn from school by their parent or legal guardian.

Notice to parent or guardian 260A.03:

- ◆ Truancy statute letter must be sent home to the child's parent or legal guardian, by first class mail or other reasonable means, after the 3rd unexcused absence.<sup>3</sup>

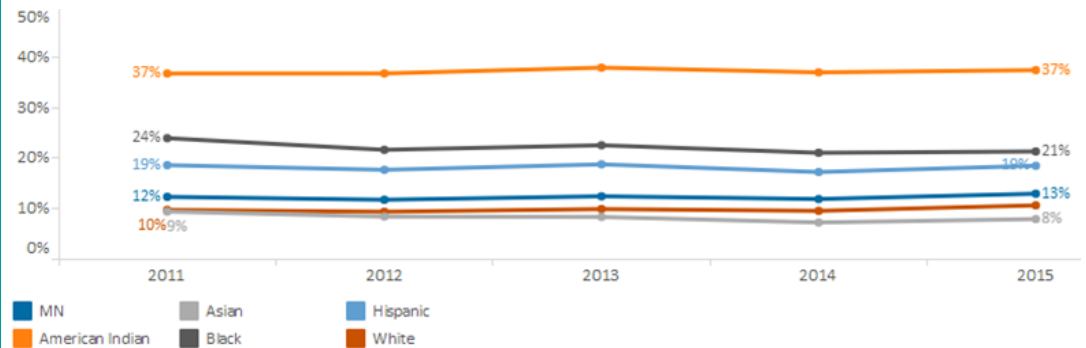
### Continuing Truant 260A.02, subd. 3

A child is absent from instruction in a school, without valid excuse within a single school year from: 1) three days if the child is in elementary school; 2) three or more class periods on three different days if the child is in middle school, junior high, and high school<sup>3</sup>

**Habitual Truant 260A.03, subd. 19:** A child under the age of 17 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for: 1) seven school days per school year if the child is in elementary school; 2) one or more class periods on seven different days, per school year, if the child is in middle school, junior high, or high school; or 3) a child who is 17 years of age who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for one or more class period on seven different school days and has not lawfully withdrawn from school.<sup>3</sup>

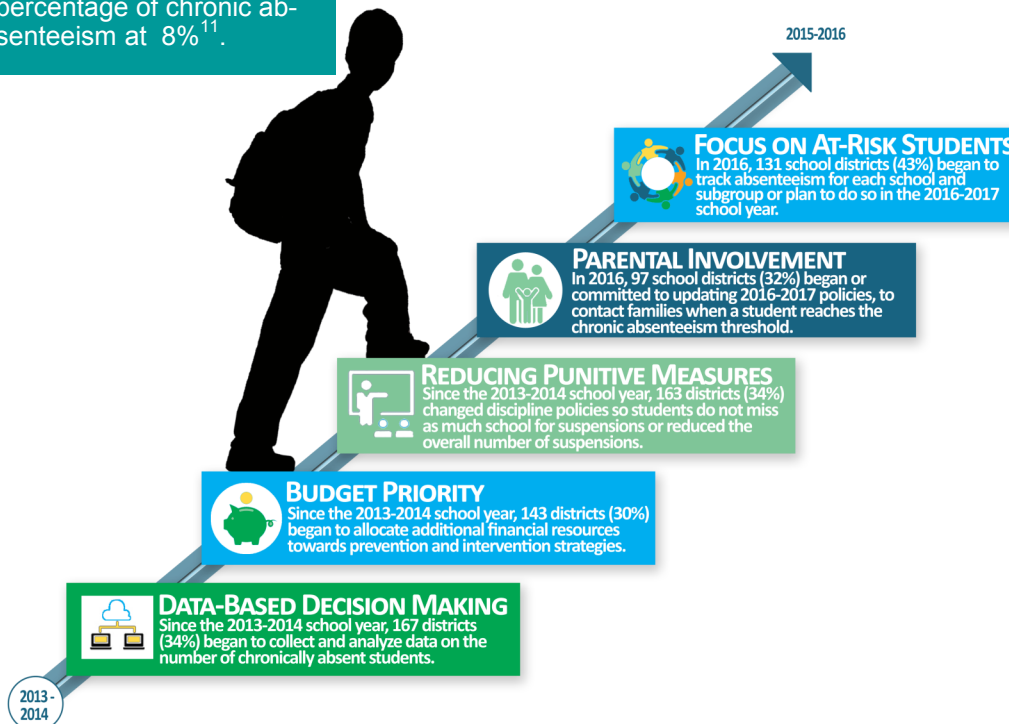
## ▣ Chronic Absenteeism: Differences in Minnesota based on Race/Ethnicity ▣

This graph shows trends in the percentages of students who are truant by race/Hispanic ethnicity throughout Minnesota between the years of 2011 and 2015. In 2015, the American Indian population had 37% of students chronically absent. Among black students, 21% were chronically absent. 19% of Hispanic students were chronically absent, with 11% of white students having a history of chronic absenteeism. Lastly, Asian students had the lowest percentage of chronic absenteeism at 8%<sup>11</sup>.



## Steps California took to Reduce Truancy

- ◆ Collect and analyze data on the number of chronically absent students.
- ◆ Allocate additional funding to truancy prevention and intervention.
- ◆ Reduce school disciplinary measures that involve missing school, such as suspensions.
- ◆ Increase parent involvement by contacting families early
- ◆ Focus interventions on at-risk groups of students<sup>8</sup>





**“Keeping kids connected to learning is not solely a school problem; families, communities, and any adults who touch children’s lives should also be part of the solution. If children are hanging out near businesses during school hours, adults should ask them why they aren’t in school. Neighbors need to notice when children are home too often. Schools and families should use online portals to keep on top of student attendance. Caring adults must surround kids with this message: School attendance matters. Showing up in class and being engaged in learning every day are keys to future success.”<sup>6</sup>**

## ▣ Interventions Demonstrated to Work ▣

The following intervention programs attend to the factors that lead to truancy early on in a child’s life. By using these, or similar early intervention techniques, students, families, and communities can reap the short and long-term benefits from reducing the number of truant students.

### **The Ramsey County Truancy Intervention Project (TIP)**

- ◆ Reduced number of students missing 15 days of school or more for any reason by 50%.
- ◆ Raised graduation rates by over 50%, over a period of ten years.
- ◆ Connects students and families with services to deal with root issues of chronic truancy.
- ◆ Based on early intervention and early identification of absenteeism.
- ◆ Based on a three-level intervention strategy.
- ◆ Becomes increasingly intrusive if attendance does not improve.
- ◆ Allows for flexibility in taking families individual situation into consideration.
- ◆ Parents often required to communicate with schools to monitor the child’s attendance.
- ◆ Requires each child to attend summer school.
- ◆ Includes an interdisciplinary coalition of county attorneys, social workers, teachers, education assistants, school administrators, service providers, and probation officers.
- ◆ Students and their families are connected with support services to help deal with risk factors associated with habitual truancy.<sup>14</sup>

### **Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports**

- ◆ Utilized in over 18,000 United States schools.
- ◆ Focuses on teaching social skills and positive behavioral intervention early in the school year.
- ◆ Teaches positive behaviors to all students.
- ◆ Goal includes reducing problem behaviors in the entire student body.
- ◆ Reduces the use of exclusionary discipline, by improving the overall school climate.
- ◆ Utilizes a 3-tiered approach, begins with prevention, through rewards and consequences.
- ◆ Allows for increasingly individualized instruction for at-risk students.<sup>12</sup>

### **Restorative Practices**

- ◆ Four Chicago High Schools experienced increased attendance and up to an 80% reduction in misconduct and arrests after two years of beginning restorative programming.
- ◆ Student-focused approach that focuses on individual accountability.
- ◆ Utilized after a student has been responsible for disruptive or unsafe behaviors at school.
- ◆ Focuses on repairing harm to any victims and the school and the community as a whole.
- ◆ Approach found to be particularly effective for African-American students.
- ◆ Collaborative approach between students that can include peace circles, student juries, peer mediation, peer conflict resolution and other initiatives.<sup>12</sup>



## ▣ Recommendations ▣

Attending school builds a foundation for academic achievement and social success in the future.<sup>15</sup> School absenteeism can progress to truancy, which has been demonstrated to be a major stepping stone to dropping out of the education system entirely.<sup>14</sup>

**“Students with excessive truancy who are at risk of dropping out must receive outreach services. Potential drop-outs and pushouts represent another significant high-risk group.”<sup>13</sup>**

- ◆ **Support state policies to mandate implementation of early intervention to address truancy.**
- ◆ **Develop a statewide program to keep track of attendance and truancy for students who move out of county and/or school district.**
- ◆ **Increase funding for Mental Health services in schools.**
  - ◆ SF 0768: School-linked mental health services funding increase; school staff and program development; intermediate school districts program evaluation and alternative learning centers (ALC) additional supports; appropriations.
  - ◆ HF 1255: School-linked mental health services appropriations increased, school staff and program development provided, intermediate school district program evaluation required, and additional supports for students attending alternative learning centers provided.
- ◆ **Increase school staff and establish an educational foundation across Minnesota schools.**
  - ◆ SF 0189: General education disparity aid creation for school districts with low general education revenue and low property wealth per pupil and appropriation.
  - ◆ HF 0181: State aid new source created for school districts with low general education revenue per pupil and low property wealth per pupil, and money appropriated.
- ◆ **Increase the number of school social workers in our schools.**
  - ◆ HF 0967: Voluntary school social worker aid program funding provided, and money appropriated.
  - ◆ SF 0535: School social worker aid program appropriation.

All bills were introduced during the 2017 Minnesota legislative session.



Copies of this brief can be accessed by calling the Department of Social Work at (507) 389-6504 or by going to: <http://sbs.mnsu.edu/socialwork/>

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