

QUOTES ON TARDINESS AND TRUANCY

PLUS A SHORT STORY:

“THE GRAND DELUSION,” Page 111

AND TWO ESSAYS:

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**“SKIPPIN’, DITCHIN’, AND CUTTIN’: HOW TO TROUNCE
TRUANCY,” Page 128**

A kindergarten teacher asked a school social worker to observe a child in her class. At the tender age of 5, this boy had developed a regular pattern of absence, disturbing to his teacher. The teacher had been unable to reach the boy’s parents by telephone. The social worker observed the child in class and noticed nothing unusual about his play behavior. Finally, he called the boy aside to ask him why he was absent every Thursday. He told the child how much everyone liked him at school and how they enjoyed having him there. Why was it he did not come to school on Thursdays? Was there something about school activities on that day of the week that he disliked? Was there some problem at home that kept him there?

‘No problem’ replied the boy, his face lighting up. ‘But you see, my mother is an opera singer and she travels a lot. Thursday is the day she has arranged to stay at home to love me.’

—Chrissie Bamber

Until we are ready to tackle poverty in this country, we will never see a solution to student truancy.

—Adriane Kayoko
Peralta

Truancy is a part of American folklore. From the days of Tom Sawyer, mature Americans have chuckled over the antics of adolescents attempting to avoid the drudgery of the classroom in favor of the delights of the old swimming hole. Even today, teachers and administrators chuckle over the lame excuses that students use to cover their absence from school. However, the time has long passed when school personnel can afford to take lightly the unexcused absence of any student. Times have changed since playing hooky was simply considered naughty. Today an education is a necessity, and the present degree to which students deprive themselves of the benefits of a formal education is astonishing.

—Dan L. Miller

There is a close correlation between getting up in the morning and getting up in the world.

--Ron Dentinger

Some researchers posit that if students who live in high-poverty neighborhoods attended school every day with no other changes being made, students would experience increased rates of academic achievement, high-school completion, post-secondary education attainment, and economic productivity.

—*Center for American
Progress*

Crime is a social problem, and education is the only real deterrent. Look at all of us in prison; we were all truants and dropouts, a failure of the educational system. Look at your truancy problem, and you're looking at your future prisoners. Put the money there.

—Wilbert Rideau

We know chronic truancy leads to dropping out, which dramatically increases the odds that a young person will become either a perpetrator or a victim of crime. Folks, it is time to get serious about the problem of chronic truancy in California. Last year we had 600,000 truant students in our elementary schools alone, which roughly matches the number of inmates in our state prisons. Is it a coincidence? Of course not.

—California Attorney
General Kamala
Harris

Attendance once again was tagged as the most troublesome day-to-day problem in the administration of secondary schools.

—N. Deleonibus

Esmeralda, a Latina sophomore, was the best softball player on the high school team that I coached. Nearly every time she came to the plate, she hit a triple or a double. While the other parents routinely came to the games, Esmeralda's parents were never there. One day, Esmeralda came to practice with a new tattoo of a boy's name. I assumed that it was the name of a new boyfriend, but she corrected me and told me it was her father's name. Her father was serving a life sentence in state prison. He had been in prison since Esmeralda was a child. The following year, Esmeralda was absent from school for four consecutive days. When she showed up on Friday, I asked her where she had been. She told me that over the weekend federal agents broke down her front door at 4:00 in the morning; they searched the entire house and arrested her mother and aunt. Esmeralda was terrified and had no idea what was going on. She later found out that her mother was part of a drug smuggling operation, and the police had found large amounts of drugs and money in the home. After her mother's arrest, law enforcement seized their home, and Esmeralda and her older sister, who was only 20 years old, needed a place to stay. The two of them had no money, so they stayed with their mother's friends. From then on, Esmeralda only came to school about once a week, until she finally dropped out. Esmeralda was a very talented student-athlete, and any college would have been lucky to have her, but her family's circumstances prevented her from ever having a chance.

—Adriane Kayoko
Peralta

Truancy is not the problem -- it's an indicator of other problems. When students aren't in school, we need to understand why they stay away before we can affect solutions.

—*California Department
of Education*

Causes of chronic absenteeism include illness—asthma is one of the most common—missed buses, broken cars, and just playing hooky. In kindergarten and 1st grade, which have the highest rates of absenteeism outside of high school, parents often let their children stay home because they don't understand that academic expectations have stepped up in those grades since they were students.

—Erik W. Robelen

BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

According to the *School Attendance Improvement Handbook* from the *California Department of Education*, the following are known barriers to student attendance:

- Associating with the wrong kinds of friends
- Feeling resentment toward authority
- Putting time into a job to earn money for themselves or for their families
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Having problems relating to people
- Being the victim of bullying
- Feeling little support or experiencing conflict at home
- Believing the school doesn't offer interesting, challenging, or rewarding classes or activities
- Falling behind others in math or reading skills and skipping classes when not doing well, thereby perpetuating a lack of skills and a tendency to avoid school
- Experiencing personal barriers, such as language problems, racial or cultural conflicts, embarrassment because of a lack of suitable or clean clothing, or teen pregnancy
- Being held back a grade or more
- Being suspended or expelled
- Having transportation problems
- Fearing community violence

*—California Department
of Education*

Nancy Patterson...spends most of her time with her mother in a second-floor walk-up apartment next door to a grocery store. The 7-year-old child cannot read or write, said one of her teachers at nearby Hibbard School. Nancy has been in school only about three days since last November.

Her mother, a heavysset woman who speaks in a rough, loud voice, said, 'I'm too tired. I know she's supposed to go, but I'm too tired to make her.' When a truant officer explained the importance of getting Nancy to school, she screamed at the officer, 'Tell her that, don't tell me.'

A blond, affectionate child who walks directly up to a stranger and smiles, Nancy said she wants to go to school 'because I have more friends there.' But on other occasions, she has told a truant officer, 'Why should I? I'll just drop out when I'm 16 anyway.' So Nancy spends hours playing in an alley behind her home with children too young to attend school.

—Mary Elson

While many think of chronic absenteeism as a secondary school problem, research is beginning to suggest that the start of elementary school is the critical time to prevent truancy—particularly as those programs become more academic.

‘Early attendance is essential; this is where you really want to work on them,’ said Kim Nauer, the education project director at the *Center for New York City Affairs at The New School*, which studies attendance issues. ‘By the time you get to 5th or 6th grade, you can really get a cascade effect that you can’t recover from. How much money do we spend in a school system on all of this recuperative stuff in high school—getting the kid back and re-engaged—as opposed to making sure the kids don’t slip off in elementary school?’

—Sarah D. Sparks

As Captain Kangaroo once noted, kids don’t drop out of high school, they drop out of kindergarten, then they wait 10 years to make it official.

—Peter Kendall

Men who had been truant in elementary school tended to marry women who had also been truant in elementary school and that truancy in either parent was associated with an excess rate of truancy in both sons and daughters, thus perpetuating truant patterns in succeeding generations.

—Robins, Ratcliff and
West

What motivates kids to go to class? Strong relationships with teachers and coursework they see as relevant and important for the future. That’s what the students themselves said, and what every classroom teacher and curriculum expert needs to understand.

—Richard Laurent

Eric remembers how often he skipped school before he officially dropped out: 52 days straight. On those days, he and several friends drove around town and chowed down at fast food restaurants to kill time—but that was fun compared to high school, he says. ‘Not going to school can be addictive, like smoking. You do it once and you can’t stop. I didn’t have the willpower to stay in school,’ Eric recalls. Eventually, a combination of parental pressure and Eric’s own desire ‘not to be poor’ convinced him to enter an alternative high school.

—Rick Allen

Will it be:
In school today,
Or in and out of jobs tomorrow?

Cash in the pocket today,
Or dollars in the bank tomorrow?

Hot rods today,
Or a good car tomorrow?

A big guy today
And the little guy tomorrow?

Out of school today,
And out of luck tomorrow?

--Unknown

80% of success in life is showing up.

--Woody Allen

Oversleeping is a mighty poor way to make your dreams come true.

--Unknown

While a high school student may be able to complete high school with a record of truancy, the workplace may not be as forgiving. Persistent tardiness or absenteeism are grounds for termination in most businesses.

--Corinne E. Brophy

Few things tend more to alienate friendship than a want of punctuality in our engagements.

--William Hazlitt

Almost all chronic truants will become dropouts.

--Douglas Hoeft

Every degree of separation is a degree of alienation.

--Benjamin Whichcote

Absence and death are the same—only that in death there is no suffering.

--Walter S. Landor

Many truants live in abject poverty, and some are being reared by parents who are little more than children themselves. Others are the victims of neglect, physical and sexual abuse, drug addiction, gang activity or broken homes. For these children, attending school takes a back seat to simple survival.

Today's truant officers understand, this reality. They know dragging a student back to school isn't enough, not if a personal problem has been keeping the child out of school to begin with. That problem must be resolved, and truant officers nowadays seek as best they can to resolve it. As a result, they often find themselves immersed in heart-breaking stories of personal tragedy.

It's not a job for the meek. To reach these kids, truant officers walk neighborhoods most people prefer to avoid. They see close up the ugly side of our society—the dilapidated public housing, vacant lots piled high with garbage, boarded-up homes, graffiti-covered walls, and dark doorways where grim-faced men loiter, drinking out of brown-paper bags. They run risks most teachers and administrators never even consider; they see sights most of us would rather pretend didn't exist.

—Del Stover

Compulsory education laws first appeared on the books in the early 1800s. A requirement of 12 weeks per year for children 7 to 15 years old was common. Gradually, expectations for school attendance grew until by the turn of the century, 33 states required nine months of schooling a year for most children, but few enforced these laws. Then with the passage of child labor laws, states started putting teeth into their attendance requirements. While we might like to think that the movement to take children out of factories and put them in schools was motivated by interest in children's welfare, historians see other interests as well. David Tyack and others have pointed somewhat cynically to the unions, legislators, and corporate powers of the time, all of whom had their own reasons for keeping children in the classroom nine months of the year. Compulsory schooling kept older children out of the labor market, thus lessening the competition for jobs. (This was particularly true during the Great Depression and at other times when jobs were scarce.)

The public schools also became the agents for 'Americanizing' the immigrants whose values and behavior differed from those of the dominant white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant establishment. Twelve years of schooling could transform immigrants into solid American citizens. Such a system could teach immigrant children enough job skills to keep them from being a drain on society, but could also limit those skills to preserve the class stratification in occupations so as not to threaten the existing power structure. Of course these reasons were not likely to be explained to students of American history either at that time or now. Still, it took a century of pressure and legislation requiring school attendance before nonattendance or 'dropping out' was considered deviant behavior.

—Chrissie Bamber

Students who absent themselves from the classroom are students who have taken their first step toward failure.

--Dan L. Miller

Becky a student at Jefferson County has a husband, a five-month-old child, and a 20-hour-a-week job at a Dairy Queen restaurant. A half-day academic schedule at the school allows her to work and take care of her family. In the regular high school, Becky felt teachers 'were going too fast' and didn't listen to her complaints because they had so many students. At Jefferson County she's gained not only credits to finish her high school degree but confidence that she can pursue a nursing degree in college. Most of all, Becky hopes to convince her child that getting an education does matter. 'I don't want to be a dropout,' Becky says. 'I have a daughter, and I want to make a good impression on her.'

—Rick Allen

A student who is habitually absent is one of the hardest students for both teachers and administrators to deal with. After all, there's not much we can do if the student is not even in class. Worse, this student is likely to be doing nothing even when he or she does come to school. In a sense, this student is absent even when present. This is the condition we want to change.

The primary causes of this misbehavior are a lack of self confidence and power. The habitual absentee often escapes from school because of a feeling that he or she can't measure up—in academic work or relationships. And in some cases, being absent is an act of open dissent.

The primary need being revealed is escape from pain. This child is usually a poor student and finds it painful to attend class. By being absent, he or she avoids failure and gains an excuse for being behind. Also being revealed are secondary needs: aggression, power, achievement, and status. Absenteeism is often a negative form of assertion. The student gets power through the school's inability to keep him or her in school.

—Robert L. DeBruyn

Elementary school truancy rates tend to be good predictors of four subsequent childhood events: (a) being held back in elementary school, (b) dropping out of high school, (c) leaving home before age 18, and (d) marrying before age 18.

—Robins and Wish

Statistics do not tell the whole story of the truancy problem, for students who are on the streets when they should be in classrooms face harsh consequences. Not only do they suffer, but so too do their parents, the school personnel responsible for their education, and all members of their communities.

—Dan L. Miller

What do students do when they are truant from school? Being truant from school is generally a lonely and boring way of spending one's day since most of the student's associates are in school. For this reason educators have suspected that when a student is truant, there is a good chance that he will become involved in some anti-social activity.

A study in Illinois on the relationship between local crime and truancy was conducted involving 127 students from St. Charles, Geneva, and Batavia. These students all were reported as chronic truants to the Regional School Office. The group included elementary, junior high and high school students. The students' names were tallied. After two years, an investigation of the court and police records indicated that 76% of the children had been caught committing some non-school related violation of state law. A student who will defy the school attendance law, has a good chance of also defying other laws.

—Douglas Hoeft

PERFECT attendance. But for one day of third grade, I would have had perfect attendance from kindergarten through high school graduation. I missed that single day because my parents made me stay home. Getting up and going to school was, for me, an act of self-preservation. I was sure that, if I missed any new material, I would get so far behind that I'd never catch up. It was entirely my choice. Sick or healthy, I was at my desk.

While Huckleberry Finn's aversion to attending school falls at one end of the spectrum, and my compulsion falls at the other, most students are somewhere in between. When students don't make a choice that places them somewhere in my vicinity, parents usually help them make it. If parents don't follow through or if they're unsuccessful, the school usually steps in. And if that doesn't work, state law asserts itself.

What will probably make the most difference in attendance is whether students feel that their participation in school is meaningful, that someone cares that they are present, and that being absent means a valuable experience has been lost. To the extent that students believe these things, attendance policies become moot. Students will be present because they want to be.

—Kathy Christie

Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to help keep students in school during school hours. Create a poster that states 'We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 18 during school hours.'

—*Colorado Foundation
for Families and
Children*

Officials are calling it an epidemic. But it's not a physical malady. Instead of fever, headaches, stomach upsets and the like, the symptoms are apathy, disinterest, indifference, irresponsibility and misplaced priorities. And what this epidemic is causing is stymied futures and shattered dreams. The epidemic is truancy — children who are absent from classrooms without valid excuses. While skipping school is certainly not new, today's truancy epidemic has a new twist. In the past, when a student was absent without an excuse, generally the student's parents didn't have a clue their child was not hitting the books. But today, in many cases, parents are well aware their child isn't in school, even though state law requires parents to make sure their child attends school.

—Marsha Miller

Approximately 1,000 high school students will drop out with each hour that passes in a school day in America. This means that 30 percent of the class of 2007, or 1.2 million students, were estimated to have dropped out last year. The high school dropout crisis has received significant recent attention from researchers, policy makers and the media. It has been widely reported that one in three boys, and nearly 50 percent or more of some racial and ethnic groups of boys, will fail to graduate from high school with a diploma in four years. This is an alarming finding that demands prompt remedial action. What has been generally overlooked, however, is that girls, too, are dropping out of high school at dangerously high rates. In fact, one in four girls overall do not finish high school, and the numbers are worse for girls of color. One in two Native American female students, four in ten Black female students, and nearly four in ten Hispanic female students fail to graduate with a diploma each year. There are significant costs to be paid by both the individual and the nation as a whole for each and every student who drops out of high school. In general, dropouts face significant challenges to obtaining employment and achieving economic security. Female dropouts are at particular economic risk. As compared to their male peers, girls who fail to graduate from high school have higher rates of unemployment; make significantly lower wages; and are more likely to need to rely on public support programs to provide for their families. With so many students dropping out of high school each year, the aggregate drain on our nation's economy—through foregone income tax revenue and increased public spending—is substantial. At a time when every hour counts, the dropout rates and educational experiences of female students cannot be ignored.

—*National Women's Law
Center*

What we knew from our older truants was that most of them were young truants. They started truanting in kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth grade.

—Molly Jasmer

Absenteeism, and truancy in particular, are problems of such magnitude that school administrators have an increasingly difficult time dealing with them in both elementary and secondary education. The consequences of declining school attendance are serious, for students who absent themselves from the classroom are students who have taken the first step toward failure. They cannot participate in formal learning experiences, they cannot interact with their peers in a productive academic environment, and they are not in a position to receive the positive reinforcement, counseling, and tutoring from teachers, counselors, and administrators that are critical to academic success.

—Dan L. Miller

Peyton Walker's absences began piling up in seventh grade as she suffered from depression, anxiety and migraines, she said. After missing a court date in Dallas County truancy court at the age of 12, she said she was arrested and handcuffed at school in the Dallas suburb of Mesquite. Walker said the legal situation just made things worse.

'It was more: No matter if I go (to school) or not, I'm going to go to court anyway,' said now 18-year-old Walker, who graduated from high school this spring. She and her mother, who is on disability, still have \$2,000 in pending fines, and Walker won't be able to get a driver's license until they are paid.

—*Associated Press*

I can say anecdotally that every kid I knew who was chronically truant came from a home in chaos. I had a student last year who was absent about half the time because his father had been shot and his mother, who had lost her job, cried every night because she didn't know how she would pay the rent. My student walked the streets day after day looking for a job, even though no one would hire him because he was only 15. His mother begged him to stay in school and graduate, assuring him she would figure something out. Our counselor referred the family to public services, but because my student's mother was undocumented, she was afraid to seek them. And my student continued to be absent about half the time.

—Ellie Herman, Teacher

Not every day is a good one. Raquel has been in therapy and on medication for depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a mood disorder since she was about 12. Sometimes, she wakes up and just doesn't feel right. 'I sit on the couch for, like, 30 minutes. Literally just sit there, then I start, like, slouching around the house,' she says. 'Mama's like, Are you ready for school? And I'm like, no. And I get in an argument with somebody.' Usually her sister Luranetta, who sleeps in the living room with Raquel. 'I get angry, and I start crying.'

—Jyoti Thottam

The More You Learn, the More You Earn.

—*mpdc.dc.org/truancy*

Time away from the classroom hurts a student's chance to succeed. In fact, truancy is a distinct predictor of low student achievement and high school dropout rates. As a result, students who miss school may face lifelong economic consequences. In fact, truancy can be a gateway to the school-to-prison pipeline. Furthermore, truancy has repercussions far beyond the individual and can affect the overall success of schools, other students, and communities at large.

—Farah Z. Ahmad and
Tiffany D. Miller

I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time.

—Charles Dickens

Arriving late was a way of saying that your own time was more valuable than the time of the person who waited for you.

—Karen Joy Fowler

People who are chronically tardy never understand the many ways in which they screw up the schedules of people who are punctual and 'normal'...

—Lauren Kate

Of 182 boys and young men recently locked up in Illinois' three medium-security youth prisons, at least 135 used to miss so much school that they were labeled chronic truants.

—David Jackson and
Gary Marx

A young economist at Northwestern University named C. Kirabo Jackson....created a proxy measure for students' noncognitive ability, using just four pieces of existing administrative data: attendance, suspensions, on-time grade progression, and overall GPA. Jackson's new index measures, in a fairly crude way, how engaged students were in school—whether they showed up, whether they misbehaved and how hard they worked in their classes. Jackson found that this simple noncognitive proxy was, remarkably, a better predictor than students' test scores of whether the students would go on to attend college, a better predictor of adult wages, and a better predictor of future arrests.

—Paul Tough

A dropout is a youngster who will find it hard to earn a living because he refuses to learn a living.

—Unknown

The correlation between high school dropout rates and crime rates is higher than the correlation between smoking and lung cancer.

--Harold Hodgkinson

Lose an hour in the morning, and you will spend all day looking for it.

—Richard Whately

I could never think well of a man's intellectual or moral character, if he was habitually unfaithful to his appointments.

—Nathaniel Emmons

Unfaithfulness in the keeping of an appointment is an act of clear dishonesty. You may as well borrow a person's money as his time.

—Horace Mann

CONJUGATE THIS:

I cut class, you cut class, he, she, it cuts class. We cut class, they cut class. We all cut class. I cannot say this in Spanish because I did not go to Spanish today. Gracias a dios. Hasta luego.

—Laurie Halse Anderson

You can drag my body to school but my spirit refuses to go.

—Bill Watterson

'Mom, is the world coming to an end?' Jonny asked, picking up the plate of cookies and ramming one into his mouth.

'No, it isn't,' Mom said, folding her lawn chair and carrying it to the front of the house. 'And yes, you do have to go to school tomorrow.'

—Susan Beth Pfeffer

I said school starts tomorrow. I didn't say I was going to be there.

—Kim Harrison

Can we please drop the whole 'school starts tomorrow' talk? I'd like to live in denial for a little while longer.

—Aileen Erin

Soon she noted that teachers in subjects besides gym didn't report her if she cut. They were happy not to have her there: her intelligence made her a problem. It demanded attention and rushed their lesson plans forward.

—Alice Sebold

DYING IS NOT HOT

By Celia the Dark

Cool is no longer cool because cool is now hot,
and school isn't school if you are skipping.
Then the neighborhood is school and John,
the creepy dropout guy is teaching.

And it isn't cool because the cool kids stay in school,
where the other cool kids tell them how hot they are
and they wouldn't want to miss a dance for cutting.

Kids who skip school were never cool or hot but
already dumped into the trashcan with leftover lunch pizza,
bruised into a locker, asking their parents for extra lunch money
so they can smoke and act like they never cared anyway.

And skipping school's not cool but it is school
because that's where they learn what the uncool learn
about life and dying.

—Karen Finneyfrock

Folk can't learn their lessons if they skip school.

—Peter V. Brett

Senioritis (n.) A crippling disease that strikes high school seniors. Symptoms: laziness, an over-excessive wearing of track pants, and sweatshirts. Lack of studying, repeated absences, and a dismissive attitude. The only known cure is a phenomenon known as Graduation.

—*Urban Dictionary*

If your watch is slow by just four minutes, that's not much - unless you've been warned that if you're even one minute late ever again you will be fired. Then four minutes make a big difference.

—Zig Ziglar

I never knew a man come to greatness or eminence who lay abed late in the morning.

—Jonathan Swift

If you're early, you're on time. If you're on time, you're late.

—Lik Hock Yap Ivan

Nothing inspires confidence in a business man sooner than punctuality, nor is there any habit which sooner saps his reputation than that of being always behind time.

--William Mathews

Punctuality is the soul of business.

--Thomas Chandler
Haliburton

I always arrive late at the office, but I make up for it by leaving early.

—Charles Lamb

'Tis the voice of the sluggard;
I heard him complain,
you have waked me too soon,
I must slumber again.

—Isaac Watts

A balanced diet and physical activity are vital to academic performance. A healthy diet has a direct link to increased cognitive function and memory skills, decreased absenteeism from school, and improved mood. These advantages can help students stay focused and complete their coursework.

—Matt Cartwright

Without the ability to be present we are missing much of what the adventure has to offer.

—Allan Lokos

Teachers have rules, but there are 101 reasons for being late to class. Was the student threatened by a bully and hiding in the bathroom? Never assume; talk to kids. Why was your paper late? Why didn't you take the makeup test? When kids don't live up to your expectations, don't treat it as a crime but as a problem to be solved. The search for solutions begins with getting more information, often from students.

--Anne Wescott Dodd

Among my favorite tricks was raising my hand for the lavatory pass, and then heading out for an epic school-wide spin. I was evolving into the kind of kid who knew the line between hijinks and delinquency, but had no sense of how easily the first led to the second.

--Ta-Nehisi Coates

Somebody does somethin' stupid, that's human. They don't stop when they see it's wrong, that's a fool.

—Elvis Presley

10 Things That Require Zero Talent

1. Being on time
2. Work ethic
3. Effort
4. Body language
5. Energy
6. Attitude
7. Passion
8. Being coachable
9. Doing extra
10. Being prepared

—Molly Fletcher

The misbehaving child is NEVER ill.

--Fred Gosman

Regardless of GPA, race or prior offenses, students who have been arrested are nearly twice as likely as their peers to drop out of high school, even if they never go to court, according to a 2006 study by the criminologist Gary Sweeten. 'Just being arrested can have long-term consequences,' says Josh Gupta-Kagan, an assistant professor specializing in juvenile justice at the University of South Carolina School of Law. 'Teenagers start to see the school as out to get them.'

—Amanda Ripley

Children deprived of words become school dropouts; dropouts deprived of hope behave delinquently. Amateur censors blame delinquency on reading immoral books and magazines, when in fact, the inability to read anything is the basic trouble.

—Peter S. Jennison

Always tell your children as much of the truth as they can understand, if only to establish the most valuable attribute you have as a parent—your credibility. If you con your three-year-old into believing that the booster shot won't hurt, why should he or she believe your later claims that marijuana, booze and skipping school will?

--Stan and Jan
Berenstain

Punctuality is one of the cardinal business virtues: always insist on it in your subordinates.

--Don Marquis

Punitive measures whether administered by police, teachers, spouses or parents have well known standard effects: (1) escape-education has its own name for that: truancy, (2) counterattack-vandalism on schools and attacks on teachers, (3) apathy-a sullen do-nothing withdrawal. The more violent the punishment, the more serious the by-products.

—B. F. Skinner

There are some things that we feel that we absolutely must do. We might know that they're wrong, or pointless, or gravely punishable, and yet we do them anyway. These actions are not born of anger or emotion - we are perfectly sober. It's rather inexplicable. When the time comes, we can't stop ourselves, and so we cannot blame ourselves.

—Isamu Fukui

Poor truant, passionate fool!
Life's book is hard to understand:
Why couldst thou not remain at school?

—Charles Hanson Towne

There aren't even truant officers any more. I deal with kids that don't come to school and why (they don't). It has a lot to do with family problems. That is the biggest change. The counselor must find out how to solve the problem. The truancy officer must connect with the community and understand family problems.

—Dennis Kirk

Truancy is an equal opportunity offense. It's equal exactly with males and females. The demographics are pretty much the demographics of the district, so it hasn't targeted one ethnic group or one gender group.

—Dennis Thompson

SCHOOL REFUSAL VS. TRUANCY

School Refusal

Severe emotional stress about attending school.
Parents know about the child's absence.
Child doesn't have significant antisocial behaviors.
During school hours, child usually stays home in the safe environment.
Child is willing to do schoolwork and completes work at home.

Truancy

Lack of excessive fear about going to school.
Child tries to hide absence from parents.
Child exhibits antisocial behavior like stealing and lying.
During school hours, child frequently doesn't stay home.
Lack of interest in schoolwork.

—Unknown

There is no pleasure in having nothing to do. The fun is in having lots to do and not doing it.

—Unknown

If the school can send in substitute teachers, how come we can't send in substitute students?

—*cartoonstock.com*

Doctor to Parent: Your son's poor grades are caused by a condition known as Attendance Deficit Disorder.

—Unknown

'I want to hire employees who arrive late.'...Said no boss ever.

—Unknown

High school dropouts are forfeiting their opportunity to pursue the American dream.

—Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Strict punctuality is perhaps the cheapest virtue which can give force to an otherwise utterly insignificant character.

—John F. Boyes

CONSEQUENCES OF TRUANCY

- **Dropping out of school.** Students who are chronically truant typically fall behind in grade level and drop out of school.
- **Delinquency.** Students who are chronically truant are also at-risk for other behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and delinquency.
- **Negative effect upon others students.** Students who are chronically truant require extra time from teachers; teachers have less time to spend with the regularly-attending students in the classroom when they must create make-up work for truants.

—*www.truancyprevention.org*

School attendance difficulties have long been recognized to be a problem. Even before mandatory education became prominent, Shakespeare wrote of ‘the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face creeping like a snail unwillingly to school’ (*As You Like It*). Growing up in the Midwest my favorite truant in literature would have to be Tom Sawyer. Who could not help but like Tom? He was always skipping out of school for adventures along the Mississippi. Tom’s escapades were always so exciting. A day exploring caves could not be compared to a day of rote memorization in a one room school house. The days of Tom Sawyer were long ago. Few students of today are missing school to fish along the banks of the Mississippi. Truancy is a serious problem faced by schools.

—Patty (Chiles) Young

It is common wisdom that school is the best place for a child to be in the long run, but many of the youths and families that pass through juvenile court live in such desperate conditions that they’re not able or willing to think about the distant future. They think about what’s going to happen today, and ‘if there’s a chance I’m going to get beat up (at school) today, I ain’t going. And if the school threatens me with detention if I’m absent, then I’m not going tomorrow either, because I don’t want to serve detention.’

—Criminal Justice
Professor
David Olson

Tardiness often robs us opportunity, and the dispatch of our forces.

—Niccolo Machiavelli

People count up the faults of those who keep them waiting.

--French Proverb

You feel like a fool when you don't know how to fill out (a job) application. You say, 'I don't want this stinking job.' But you are thinking, 'I wish I was smart enough to read the application.' I always blame the drugs, but it was me not having an education that was the biggest step, because I always fell back on drugs when I felt stupid.

—Prison Inmate
Robert Sloan

If I have made an appointment with you, I owe you punctuality. I have no right to throw away your time, if I do my own.

—Richard Cecil

I have noticed that the people who are late are often so much jollier than the people who have to wait for them.

—Edward Verrall Lucas

I owe all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time.

—Lord Nelson

Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.

—William Shakespeare

Wake late, win late.

—Amit Kalantri

If you want to know the value of a minute ask the person who came to the train station or airport a minute late.

—Sunday Adelaja

Beginning of a great day begins a night before.

—Sukant Ratnakar

If you have been told that you are late and unreliable more than once, then not only do you lack punctuality, but you also lack decency and seriousness, which is certainly very annoying.

—Auliq Ice

If you want to be regarded as a valuer of life, then first value time.

—Auliq-Ice

Japanese are one of the most punctual people he had ever worked with. They could, he imagined, put the Germans to shame in their high expectation for timeliness.

—Vann Chow

The individual who is habitually tardy in meeting and appointment, will never be respected or successful in life.

—Wilbur Fisk

Our attendance rate and tardiness went down by 50 percent this week. One senior even told me he'd come to school on time each day if he could come at 11 a.m.

—Jim Oyster

Better never than late.

—George Bernard Shaw

The latest I like to be to meeting is 15 minutes early.

—David O. McKay

Preparedness and punctuality are two of the most important qualities of a leader.

—John A. Widtsoe

It is difficult to prove yourself reliable when people are required to wait for you.

—Wes Fessler

If you are 15 minutes early you are on time. If you are on time you are late and if your late you didn't want to be there.

—Unknown

Perhaps punctuality is a quality made even more valuable because it is found in so few people. Punctuality is not usually thought of in our day as a major virtue.

—Sterling W. Sill

Punctuality is closely related to faithfulness and dependability. Being tardy can be linked to uninterest, apathy, slothfulness and procrastination.

—Sterling W. Sill

Being on time to appointments and meetings is a phase of self-discipline and an evidence of self-respect. Punctuality is a courteous compliment the intelligent person pays to his associates.

—Marvin J. Ashton

When a secretary of Washington, excusing himself for being late, said that his watch was too slow, the reply of Washington was, 'You must get a new watch, or I must get a new secretary.'

—Charles Fontaine

'Punctuality, my children,' said the old man, 'is the thief of time. I have been a victim to the pernicious vice of punctuality all my life. I must have wasted years by being up to time and having to wait for people.'

—Unknown

Promptitude is not only a duty, but is also a part of good manners; it is favorable to fortune, reputation, influence, and usefulness; a little attention and energy will form the habit, so as to make it easy and delightful.

—Charles Simmons

Punctuality or the lack thereof oftentimes is the only introduction one will ever have to new groups and friends. Serenity and poise are not the companions of those who lack the courtesy and judgment to be on time.

—Marvin J. Ashton

The Lord is the greatest of all believers in punctuality. In fact he is the author of punctuality. He has a billion planets whirling through space in different directions and at different speeds, but each one is exactly on time. If one planet were a half minute late there might be very serious consequences. But God, who is the author of order, is in the habit of having his creations in exactly the right places at exactly the right time. Then how do you think he must feel when his greatest masterpiece, created in his own image, shows a high degree of irresponsibility and undependability in keeping his most simple appointments?

—Sterling W. Sill

She had managed to go almost three weeks without being late. Admittedly on two of those days she'd perambulated around the office like someone doing a good imitation of the walking dead - but she'd been timely walking dead.

—Michelle Sagara West

Better to start early than finish late.

—J. R. Rim

Maybe it's because he never had any control over what was happening to him as a boy. Being late was somehow a way of taking charge.

—Jan Karon

‘All my life,’ he said, ‘I been witness to people showin’ up where they was supposed to be at various times after they’d said they’d be there. I never heard one yet that didn’t have a reason for it.’

‘Yessir.’

‘But there ain’t but one reason.’

‘Yessir.’

‘You know what it is?’

‘No sir.’

‘It’s that their word’s no good. That’s the only reason there ever was or ever will be.’

—Cormac McCarthy

In their landmark survey of single parenthood, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur showed that children in single-parent homes do not do as well as children who are living with both biological parents. They are more likely to have trouble in school, more likely to drop out of school and, later, more likely to become single parents themselves. Some of this is simply the fact that unstable people are more likely to become single parents and also more likely to have difficulty parenting. But even the children of widows and widowers do worse on many measures than children of intact homes—a problem that was recognized back in the 19th century, when disease and work accidents frequently carried off parents in their prime. Something about living with only one parent holds kids back. That ‘something’...is fewer resources. The Internet overflows with essays on the resourcefulness, grit, and sheer heroism of single parents who manage to be ‘both mother and father’ to their children. But while we should have nothing but admiration for people who do their best in a bad situation, we should still recognize that for the child, and often for the parent, it’s a bad situation.

--Megan McArdle

‘America generally loves crime and punishment—this idea that punishment somehow corrects behavior, that it teaches kids a lesson,’ says Jenny Egan, the Maryland public defender. In reality, the more involvement kids have with the legal system, the worse their behavior gets. Kids who get arrested and appear in court are nearly four times as likely to drop out of high school, Gary Sweeten found. But most people in the chain of decision making—from state lawmaker to the teacher to the principal to the school police officer to the prosecutor—do not realize how much damage their actions can do. Egan says: ‘I don’t think a majority of people in the system understand what it does to a child to put him in handcuffs and take him to court—at the very moment when he is trying to figure out who he is in the world.’

—Amanda Ripley

You must however pay attention to the fact that we don't only lose time to lateness. We also lose time to jokes, gossip, empty talks, sleep on duty, social media etc.

—Sunday Adelaja

IS TRUANCY A CRIME?

Truancy is a status offense – an act that is an offense only because of the offender's age, meaning the same conduct by an adult would not be an offense or involve law enforcement and the courts.

Status offenses including truancy, running away from home, failure to obey parents and curfew violations, are generally understood to reflect family problems.

Federal law forbids locking up youth charged with status offenses.

In some states, when youth violate probation orders requiring school attendance, judges can order youth be locked up.

Some states charge parents for failing to ensure their children's school attendance.

—*Strategies for Youth*

CAUSES OF TRUANCY

Truancy has evolved from Mark Twain's description in *Huckleberry Finn*: 'a joyous rebellion against authority and responsibility.' Today, truancy of youth under 14 is viewed less as failure by youth to do well in school, and more as a failure by a school to meet a student's needs.

Common causes include:

Undiagnosed or mistreated learning disabilities

Victimization by school bullies, teachers, or school staff

Fear of school

Family issues, like abuse and neglect, or obligations to care for parents or younger siblings

Mental health issues, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which are sometimes punished instead of treated, and can force youth to leave school

Failure of schools to tell parents of students' absences: some school systems tell parents after one absence, others wait 30 to 40 days

—*Strategies for Youth*

In Germany, the parents of a child absent from school without a legitimate excuse are notified by the school. If the parents refuse to send their child to school or are unable to control their child, local child services or social services officers may request the police to escort the child to school, and in extreme cases may petition a court to partially or completely remove child custody from the parents. Parents may also be fined in cases of refusal.

—*Wikipedia*

There are a number of expressions in most of languages which refer to truancy. In South Africa, the slang used is bunking, mulling, skipping or jippo. In Jamaica, it is called skulling. In Guyana skulking. In Antigua and Barbuda, it is called skudding. In New Zealand and Australia truancy is called wagging, bunking, 'jigging', ditching, or skipping school. It is called bunking (off) or skiving or wagging in the United Kingdom, mitching, twagging, 'skiving' or on the knock. In Wales, mitching or sagging. In Liverpool, bunking or cutting class, doggin, skiving, playing tickie or puggin. In Scotland, on the hop, on the bunk, mitching, beaking, skiving, doggin it or on the beak. In Ireland, mitching, on the hop, dossing, on the duck or skiving. In the United States and Canada expressions include hookey, playing hookey, ditching, dipping, jigging, sluffing, skipping, cutting class, or simply just cutting.

—*Wikipedia*

In England and Wales, truancy is a criminal offence for parents, and since the passage of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, parents of persistent truants may be imprisoned for up to three months. In 2002, the first parent was imprisoned under this provision.

Since 1998, a police officer of or above the rank of superintendent may direct that for a specified time in a specified area a police officer may remove a child believed to be absent from a school without authority to that school or to another designated place. However this is not a power of arrest and it is not a power to detain, and does not make truancy a criminal offence. There is a warning given the first time the parents allow the child to commit truancy, but if they allow it more than once, then the parents are given a fine starting from £50. Some charities have highlighted an increasing prevalence of truancy among impoverished girls during menstruation, with others alternating by inserting socks instead of tampons.

—*Wikipedia*

In Poland and the Faroe Islands, the first day of spring (March 21) is an unofficial occasion popular among children, who traditionally play truant on that day. Similarly, students in the United States have Senior Skip Day. The date for skip day varies among different schools. In the Eastern states of the United States, Senior Skip Day is often celebrated on the last Friday before Spring Break, or in some cases, the Monday after prom.

—*Wikipedia*

Generally, absentee rates are highest in public schools in the inner-city where larger numbers of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

—*truancyprevention.org*

CAUSES OF TRUANCY

What influences truancy? In early research, depending upon the perspective of the researcher, truancy was said to be caused by the student, the student's family, or the school. More recently, it is understood that a combination of all three factors usually affect truancy:

Characteristics of the Student:

- low grades in reading and mathematics
- neurological factors, such as dyslexia
- inability to make friends with mainstream students or teachers
- negative attitudes toward school or teachers

Characteristics of the Student's Family:

- parent(s) who do not value education
- parent(s) who did not complete school, were truant themselves
- poor parenting skills
- low socio-economic status
- physical or mental health problems of parents
- family history of delinquency
- single parent families
- many children in the family

Characteristics of the School:

- weak or no monitoring of daily attendance
- inconsistent attendance policies
- lack of parent involvement in the school
- lack of personalized attention to students
- lack of teacher expectations for high student achievement

—*truancyprevention.org*

Tardiness is not acceptable because it disrupts class, hurts the morale of students who are on time, reflects a negative attitude toward the class, creates disruptive problems in the corridors and develops a habit that could make future employment difficult. Students will be considered tardy if they are not in the classroom when the bell rings.

—Bartlett High School,
Bartlett, IL.

For every race and gender group, high school dropouts claim more in government-funded social services expenditures than high school graduates. For men in particular, dropouts incur more in criminal justice costs. The average dropout costs more than \$200,000 in current dollars over the course of his or her lifetime.

—*truancy prevention.org*

It is far from clear that there is any justification for the compulsory attendance laws... research has shown that schooling was well-nigh universal in the United States before attendance was required. In the United Kingdom, schooling was well-nigh universal before either compulsory attendance or government financing of schooling existed. Like most laws, compulsory attendance laws have costs as well as benefits. We no longer believe the benefits justify the costs.

—Milton Friedman-1980

Texas not only criminalized truancy but has provided for young offenders to be tried in adult courts, leading to extraordinarily harsh results especially for poorer families. But truancy-law horror stories now come in regularly from all over the country, from Virginia to California. In Pennsylvania a woman died in jail after failing to pay truancy fines; More than 1,600 people have been jailed in Berks County alone—where Reading is the county seat—over truancy fines since 2000.

—Walter Olson

Sending kids to jail—juvenile detention—for nothing more than truancy just didn't make sense. When a student is referred to juvenile detention, he or she is co-mingling with criminals—juveniles who've committed theft or assault or drug dealing.

—Chris Holbert

Texas is one of only two states in the United States that prosecutes truancy as an adult criminal offense — Wyoming is the other — and the volume of cases is staggering: In 2013, Texas had more than twice as many truancy cases as the other 49 states combined. Truancy is also the number one reason children in Texas encounter the criminal justice system. In 2013, more than 67,000 juveniles were referred to juvenile court for crimes other than truancy, ranging from homicide and theft to drug offenses and disorderly conduct. That number was 42 percent fewer than the cases of truancy.

Failure to attend school has also become a revenue stream for Texas. In fiscal year 2014, the state assessed fines and court costs of \$16.1 million for truancy convictions, even though 79.4 percent of cases that year involved economically disadvantaged students, according to an analysis by the Austin-based social and economic justice advocacy group Texas Appleseed.

—Jyoti Thottam

An estimated 7.5 million students are chronically absent each school year, and high rates of truancy start as early as kindergarten. Every teacher knows that you can't teach empty seats.

—*Pennsylvania
Department of
Education*

One of the most important things you can do to succeed in life is to attend school regularly. Truancy means missing school without permission. It includes missing a full day of school or skipping a class. It is another term for unexcused absence. You might think that skipping school once or twice is no big deal, but regular school attendance is the law. Frequently ditching school is a sign that a student may need help. Left unchecked, truancy can have strong negative effects on a person's life. Going to school makes a difference. Chronic absenteeism leads to delinquency. When a child is habitually truant this is usually an indicator of underlying issues, which can result in educational failure, social isolation and delinquent activity. When a child does not regularly attend school, he/she is at risk for dropping out of school, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy according to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

Regular and punctual attendance is the greatest factor in school success; therefore, a student and their parent's first concern should be to attend school and assigned classes regularly and on time. There is a positive correlation between regular school attendance and achievement. A student's academic success is in direct relation to their attendance and absences and tardiness have detrimental effects on their grades. The primary responsibility for attendance rests with students and their parent(s)/guardian(s).

The primary ingredient of the learning process is direct instruction from the teacher and the interaction between students and teachers within the classroom. Being absent or tardy unnecessarily from school impairs a student's opportunity to succeed in studies and also indirectly encourages the development of poor attitudes toward schoolwork and other obligations.

Communication between students, parents and school district personnel is important to understanding how attendance plays a role in a student's overall academic success.

—*advantageacademy.org*

Christine...never told anyone at school that she cooked breakfast for her younger brother and sister, got them dressed, fixed her sister's hair, waited until her brother climbed aboard his bus for kindergarten, and then rode the city bus with her sister to preschool.

—John Higgins

Students who are truant in elementary school are more likely to be truant in middle and high school, when truancy is closely linked to an increased chance of a child dropping out.

Dropouts costs states billions in incarceration, lost productivity and lost tax revenues. Studies project that increasing graduation rates by just 10 percentage points would lead to as many as 3,000 fewer murders and nearly 175,000 fewer aggravated assaults nationwide.

—Arne Duncan and
Kamala Harris

Even for minor things, it seems like police are always involved in our lives at school. When you get treated like this it is demeaning and it's a big part of how we get pushed out of school. A lot of people I know just stop caring about school. They just don't care anymore. And it fits with how police treat us in South L.A. at school and in the neighborhood, the message is: 'You are nothing.'

—Minority Student
Michael After
Receiving a
Ticket for Being
Late to School

We pretend that we can cut services and education funding to the bone—as has happened in California—without consequence. We somehow convince ourselves that despite a minimum wage so low no one can live on it, an economy that simultaneously depends on and criminalizes undocumented workers, and schools that pack 40 or 50 kids into a classroom while slashing counselors, after-school programs and summer school, we can simply demand accountability and get it. But our students aren't likely to just trot back to school when their lives are falling apart.

Yes, kids need to go to school. But truancy is a symptom, not the core problem, and accountability alone can't fix it.

—Ellie Herman, Teacher

Many families do not prioritize attendance because they may not appreciate the high marginal value of every school day, the dangers elementary school truancy and absenteeism create for their child's long term success and opportunities, and that school attendance is legally required.

—California Attorney
General Kamala
Harris

We need to confront poverty and racism head on, if we are going to solve student truancy. Our solutions must work with parents and students in providing them with the supportive services that they need to get their children to school. In addition, we need to change school environments and provide a quality education to all students so that students will want to attend school. To get to these solutions, we must change the frameworks surrounding truancy. We must be more compassionate for what parents and students living in poverty are going through.

—Adriane Kayoko
Peralta

The consequences of truancy aren't limited to a few missed lessons, either—there is a litany of long-term side effects that affect not just the children, but also their communities and the nation's economic health as a whole.

The children who are most likely to miss class are perhaps the children who need it most. Studies suggest that students of color, who make up a growing share of the nation's students, and those living in poverty are more likely to be absent than their white or more affluent peers. These children are less likely to have access to educational resources outside of the classroom and at home. They have higher dropout rates and are less likely to go to college and to be employed as adults. These students are also more likely to end up in prison.

—Emily Deruy

The single mother would say goodbye to her son before she left for work each morning and then — or so she thought — he would catch his bus to middle school.

'He was up when I left and he would go back to sleep,' she says.

That school year, the boy missed three or four days of school a week, either because he was sleeping or because his worried mother was hauling him to doctor's appointments for his sleep and anxiety issues.

—Ron Medvescek

There are many reasons students are chronically absent: illness, lack of transportation, even a need to work and contribute to the family income.

With each absence, it's harder and harder for a student to get back on track.

Academic foundations cannot be laid properly if a child is constantly missing school, says Debbie Ferryman, a dropout prevention coordinator for Tucson Unified School District. 'They can't build on that to read, build on that to have the math skills.'

When that happens, students lose their connections to schools and education as learning gaps grow, and they are far more likely to fail. By high school, they could be so short of needed class credits that they see no choice but to drop out.

—Ron Medvescek

Activities sometimes get shortchanged in favor of academic achievement. But schools are supposed to offer learning beyond academics.

—Steve Holmes

Fun and engaging electives and clubs can help boost attendance.

—David Baker

In his 27 years as a teacher at Bellows Free Academy in St. Albans, Neal Smith says he hasn't seen much improvement in the problem of truancy — children failing to attend public school. For example, he knows of a 14-year-old student who's missed at least three quarters of the school year to date. The girl's chronic absences aren't due to a severe illness or family tragedy; Smith says her family either can't, or won't, get her to school.

Smith won't identify the teen by name but virtually everyone involved in truancy prevention in Franklin County — school administrators, community justice advocates, the state's attorney, and caseworkers at the Vermont Department for Children and Families — appears to be familiar with the case. Smith says he and his colleagues feel 'a high degree of powerlessness' to do anything about it.

'What the hell happens when you have a 14-year-old kid who stays home 60 out of 80 days? Pretty much nothing,' Smith says. 'It's not like I want kids put in jail. I want them in school. But the law has no teeth.'

—Ken Picard

Recent battles in the edu-policy world have centered on standardized testing, teacher tenure, charter schools, vouchers and Common Core state standards. But debates over how to address poor student attendance — which is directly linked to low achievement and high dropout rates — have generated much less heat and light.

And that's a mistake, according to the *Center for American Progress*, which is seeking to highlight truancy as an issue that deserves far more attention than it traditionally gets.

'Education has long been seen as the means to prosperity, but that only happens if students attend school regularly,' says...CAP.

—Emma Brown

Attendance problems are not confined to older teens skipping class. Younger children — as young as preschool — also miss school at high rates, often because of family instability or other factors out of their control.

Overwhelmed schools often struggle to deal with those problems, which have their roots far outside the four walls of the classroom. But the academic impacts of missed school are clear, whether absences are excused or unexcused.

Research has shown that when kindergartners and first-graders are chronically absent, they are less likely to read on grade level, whether the absences are excused or unexcused. A student's attendance record as early as sixth grade is a powerful predictor of whether that student will eventually graduate from high school.

—Emma Brown

Punishing kids for truancy often shunts them into the criminal justice system and doesn't help persuade them to come to school.

—*Center for American Progress*

Most of the truancy issues involve hardships. To criminalize the hardships just doesn't solve anything. It costs largely low-income families. It doesn't address the root causes.

—Sen. John Whitmire

Not only is the deleterious effect of truancy upon students of prime concern, but so too is the dramatic impact that truancy has upon school finance, crime, dropout rates, teacher morale, vandalism and test scores.

—Dan L. Miller

School administrators are in a position to see first-hand the impact of truancy. Most school administrators attempt to change truant behavior through punishment, in particular by suspending children from school. While it is difficult to gauge the psychological and educational damage incurred by suspending children from school, it is also clear that suspension inhibits children's growth and development in several ways. Students who are suspended from school are usually those who have academic problems and can least afford to miss classwork. Because they are not supervised while they are suspended, they often get in trouble outside school. They lose contact with those school personnel who are in the best position to help them, and their alienation is further reinforced by physical exclusion from their peers and from the school environment. Since truant students need guidance and support from teachers and administrators, school personnel should be helping these students understand and modify their behavior through guidance and therapy, rather than turning them away by suspending them from school.

—Dan L. Miller

Parents and students need to understand the importance of attendance, starting in the early grades and continuing through high school. It's important to stress a few key messages:

- Attendance matters for doing well in school and life starting in kindergarten and even in pre-kindergarten.
- Absences can add up before you know it.
- Poor attendance is not just about unexcused absences or children willfully skipping school – excused absences can affect performance, too.
- As a parent you are responsible for making sure your child develops the habit of regular attendance.
- If you are facing tough challenges related to access to health care, unstable housing, poor transportation or lack of food, you can and should seek out support from the school and community.
- It's important to know the school-wide chronic absence rates, since too many absences can slow down instruction for all students.

—Hedy Chang and
Phyllis Jordan

WHAT TO SAY TO PARENTS:

Stress that good attendance will help your children do well in high school, college and at work.

- Your children can suffer academically if they miss 10 percent of school days or about 18 days. That can be just one day every two weeks, and that can happen before you know it.
- It doesn't matter if these absences are excused or unexcused. They all represent lost time in the classroom and a lost opportunity to learn.
- Attendance matters as early as kindergarten. Studies show many children who miss too many days in kindergarten and first grade can struggle academically in later years. They often have trouble mastering reading by the end of third grade.
- Preschool is a great time to start building a habit of good attendance. Studies show that poor attendance in preschool can predict absenteeism in later grades.
- By middle and high school, chronic absence is a leading warning sign that a student will drop out.
- Too many absent students can affect the whole classroom, creating churn and slowing down instruction.
- Families should avoid extended vacations that require your children to miss school. Try to line up vacations with the school's schedule. The same goes for doctor's appointments.
- For younger children, you can set a regular bedtime and morning routine. Make sure they get 9 to 11 hours of sleep. You can lay out clothes and pack backpacks the night before.
- For older children, you can help set homework and bedtime routines that allow for 8 1/2 to 9 1/2 hours of sleep. Make sure that when the lights go out, so do the cell phones, video games and computers.
- Get to know the teachers and administrators. With younger children, make sure you introduce your child to teachers before school starts and keep in touch with the teachers. For older students, school officials can help you stay on top of academic progress and social contacts to make sure your child is staying on track.
- Above all, set an example for your child. Show him or her that attendance matters to you and that you won't allow an absence unless someone is truly sick. Don't ask older students to help with daycare and household errands.
- You can turn to the school for help. Many schools offer services for the whole family.

- You can ask your principal to calculate chronic absence rates for the whole school. Even if your child attends regularly, it's important to know how many students in your child's school are missing 10 percent or more of the school year.

—Hedy Chang and
Phyllis Jordan

WHAT TO SAY TO STUDENTS:

- School is your first and most important job. You're learning about more than math and reading. You're learning how to show up for school on time every day, so that when you graduate and get a job, you'll know how to show up for work on time every day.
- Students who attend school regularly are more likely to graduate and find good jobs. In fact, a high school graduate makes, on average, a million dollars more than a dropout over a lifetime.
- School only gets harder when you stay home too much. Sometimes it's tempting to stay home because you've got too much work or you don't understand what's going on in class. But missing a day only makes that worse.

—Hedy Chang and
Phyllis Jordan

It is important to look at two dimensions of absenteeism: missing full days of school and missing some classes, but not others. Consider these two students' situations during their first year of high school:

Ella was bounced around from relative to relative after her mother lost custody, but none of them worked out. When her father gained custody, her situation failed to improve since he was struggling with drugs and debt. To buy her school uniform and other necessities, Ella began selling drugs the summer before she enrolled in high school. While her attendance in eighth grade was often spotty, it worsened throughout ninth grade. By the end of the semester, she had missed 27 out of 90 days. Ella then missed more than half of her second semester of ninth grade.

Jake was looking forward to high school. He enjoyed learning and was excited to play on the school football team. His parents valued education and encouraged him to do well, but Jake found that high school was more difficult than he had anticipated. When he met a couple of guys who were skipping classes to read comic books in the cafeteria, Jake started to join them. He found his math class, which took place right after lunch, to be particularly difficult. So, he would simply read comics in the cafeteria until

math was over. Despite missing only two full days of school during his first semester of ninth grade, he was absent from math class 20 times.

These are only two examples of how truancy might play out, but they do reveal how it can stem from very different causes and manifest itself in very different ways. Ella's truancy is clearly based on missing full days of school due to problems at home, while Jake displayed truant behavior in only one class because he began to experience difficulties with that particular subject.

—*Virginia Department of
Education*

Truancy is a multifaceted problem; while there are some clear school-related variables that contribute to truant behavior among students, such behavior has also been linked with problems in other domains. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, correlates of truancy fall into the following categories: School factors include issues related to the overall climate, such as a school's size and the attitudes of administrators, teachers, and other students, as well as the degree to which a school is flexible in meeting the diverse cultural and learning styles of students. Another important factor is the manner in which a school deals with truancy among students: Are clear procedures in place and consistently enforced? Do such procedures have meaningful consequences for students? Family factors include lack of parent supervision and/or guidance, poverty, substance abuse in the home, domestic violence, lack of familiarity with school attendance laws, and varied education priorities. Economic factors include employment among students as well as students who live in single-parent households, have parents with multiple jobs, and whose families lack affordable transportation and/or childcare. Student factors include substance use, limited social and emotional competence, mental health problems, poor physical health, and lack of familiarity with school attendance laws. Rather than comprising a fifth category, community variables -- which are clearly important when looking at the problem of truancy among youth -- are reflected throughout the four categories above.

For example, economic conditions and culturally-based attitudes toward education (mentioned under family factors) could easily be considered community-related variables. While examining the risk factors for substance use, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and violence is a critical step toward understanding these problem behaviors, such knowledge does not reveal how to actually reduce a young person's risk in these areas. The key to effective risk reduction actually lies in the exploration and comprehension of protective factors among youth. The resiliency literature indicates that many young people who are exposed to multiple risk factors for problem behaviors manage to steer clear of them, and it seems that the following classes of protective factors are responsible: Protective factors inherent in the individual, including female gender, high intelligence, a positive social orientation, and a resilient temperament. Protective factors related to social bonding: One of the most effective strategies for preventing problem behaviors among

youth is to strengthen their bonds with positive, prosocial family members, adults outside of the family (e.g., teachers, coaches, youth leaders), and friends.

Healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior: Young people who consistently experience healthy attitudes and clear expectations for positive behavior within their families, schools, and communities are less likely to become involved in problem behaviors -- particularly if they have developed strong bonds to the individuals and social groups within these settings.

—*Virginia Department of Education*

Young people with strong, supportive relationships with families, friends, school, and community are invested in or committed to achieving the goals held by these groups. They are bonded to these groups. Young people who are bonded are less likely to do things that threaten that bond -- such as use drugs, become violent, or commit crimes.

—*National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Developmental Research and Programs, Inc.*

What goes on in the classroom is key to keeping kids from becoming disenchanted with school. It doesn't matter whether you have 20 or 30 kids in a class. It doesn't matter whether the teacher has a graduate degree. What matters is the environment that a student enters when he walks through the classroom door.

—Robert Blum

Key Considerations for an Effective Attendance Program

1. Does our school have an effective attendance policy? Yes ___ No ___
2. Is our attendance policy clear to everyone? Yes ___ No ___
3. Is the local law enforcement agency a member of our attendance team? Yes ___ No ___
4. Does our school have a wide variety of extracurricular activities? Yes ___ No ___
5. Is good attendance positively reinforced among the staff? Yes ___ No ___
6. Are students involved in the decisions that affect them? Yes ___ No ___
7. Does a dropout identification and prevention program exist? Yes ___ No ___
8. Are our attendance-taking procedures student-proof? Yes ___ No ___

9. Is our attendance communicated regularly to staff, students, and parents? Yes___ No ___
10. Does our school have an effective counseling program with an attendance component? Yes___ No ___
11. Do opportunities exist for the nontraditional pursuit of a high school diploma? Yes___ No ___
12. Are social skills and responsibility training offered as a part of the school's curriculum? Yes___ No ___
13. Is there consistent enforcement of all policies for students and staff? Yes___ No ___
14. Does a school newsletter exist that publicizes the school's activities as well as attendance and disciplinary patterns? Yes___ No ___
15. Do our staff members have opportunities for inservice activities addressing such issues as teaching styles, cultural awareness, classroom management, and skills in community relations? Yes___ No ___
16. Is attendance taken each period? Yes___ No ___
17. Are parents contacted on each absence? Yes___ No ___
18. Are absences monitored weekly? Yes___ No ___
19. Is attendance improvement part of the districtwide goals and objectives? Yes___ No ___
20. Do all personnel know our current percentages of attendance? Yes___ No ___

*—Los Angeles County
Office
of Education*

10 Things A School Can Do to Improve Attendance

1. Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome. Make a point to say 'hello' to every parent/guardian or student you see in the halls and outside-- make it your business to know his or her names.
2. Create an environment that enables students to feel successful in some thing—no matter how small it may seem. Award academic and attendance 'letters,' as you do for athletics.
3. When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent/guardian — not their answering machine. Make a personal phone call in the evening, or call parents/guardians at work during the day.
4. When a student is absent, immediately talk with the student about why he or she was not at school—let students know you are aware...and that you care that they are at school.

5. Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to help keep students in school during school hours. Create a poster that states ‘We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 18 during school hours.’
6. Forge a relationship with local law enforcement—make them your allies in showing the community, families, and students that school is the place to be. Empower community law enforcement to return youth to school.
7. Don’t provide the temptation for youth to be truant. Close your campuses during breaks and lunch.
8. Empower and expect classroom teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant. Ask teachers to make calls to absent youth or families in the afternoon or evenings.
9. Reward and recognize good attendance—not just perfect attendance. Post large signs giving the daily attendance for the day. Reward individuals, classes, and the school for increased attendance.
10. Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected. Adopt a character education program that is planned and implemented by students.

*—Colorado Foundation
for Families and
Children*

STUDENTS, attending school every day has rewarding benefits:

- If you LEARN more, you’ll EARN more.
- What you learn now lasts a LIFETIME!!
- School encourages friendships.
- School challenges you to reach for your dreams.
- Teachers dare you to achieve and are proud of your success.
- School shows you the way to success in your future.
- School is a place for fun activities like sports and clubs.
- Knowledge can improve your quality of life.

Young people who attend school and study more learn more. Most successful people got where they are through hard work. School is the same way!

*—Newport News Public
School Board*

WHY STUDENTS SKIP SCHOOL

What Students Say

.. about why they skipped school

- Classes are boring and not relevant.
- Teachers are disrespectful.
- No one seems to care.
- Negative peer influences.
- The environment is uncomfortable.
- They don't know their different educational options.

... about what would make them stay

- More alternatives were available.
- Classes were more hands-on.
- They could get more attention and help from teachers.
- Schedules were flexible.

—*National Center for
School
Engagement at the
Colorado
Foundation for
Families and
Children*

When you're a parent, you want the best for your child. You want your child to grow up to be happy, fall in love and start a family, and to find a good job or career. You know that education is the path to a prosperous life, and you encourage your child or teenager to pay attention in school and work to get good grades so that he or she can go on to college.

But it's an unfortunate fact. — and many parents' fear — that you can't control what your child does when he or she leaves your home. Your child may leave home dressed for school and carrying a backpack full of homework, but somewhere along the way decide that it's more fun to skip school.

If your child or teen misses too many days of school without a valid excuse, a pattern of behavior known as truancy, there may be consequences for your child — and also for you as a parent or guardian. Ohio law makes it your responsibility to ensure that your child attends school or otherwise receives appropriate instruction.

You may be asking yourself, 'Is truancy a crime in Ohio?' The short answer is that it can be. When your child repeatedly is absent from school, or truant, your child may face proceedings and penalties in a juvenile court. Additionally, you may face criminal charges in an adult court, if you're convicted, the possible consequences may include:

- A jail sentence
- Fines and court costs.
- A permanent criminal record that can affect your employment or future employment
- Your child may be removed from your home and placed with relatives or in foster care

If you've been told that your child is missing too much school, or you or your child has been charged because of habitual or chronic truancy, you should seek the help of an experienced Ohio juvenile defense lawyer quickly. A defense lawyer with experience handling truancy cases involving juvenile and their parents or guardians can be your advocate in the system and work to get you an outcome that keeps your family together, keeps you out of jail, and preserves your child's future.

—Defense Lawyer Brad
Groene

PENALTIES FOR TRUANCY FOR JUVENILES

A juvenile who is habitually truant from school may be deemed an 'unruly child' in an Ohio juvenile court under Ohio Rev. Code 2151.022. When absenteeism rises to the level of chronic truancy, or when a juvenile already has an unruly child determination on his or her record, the juvenile may be deemed 'delinquent.'

Juveniles who are truant face proceedings in juvenile courts. Truancy is what is known as a status offense, meaning it's an offense that is only a violation because of the juvenile's age, and is not otherwise an offense if committed by an adult.

Juvenile courts are structured somewhat differently than adult courts. The stated goal of juvenile courts in Ohio is to rehabilitate juveniles. Accordingly, the outcomes are designed to give the juvenile the tools he or she needs to make better decisions in the future — in the case of truancy, deciding to go to school. Outcomes can be punitive and designed as deterrents, but the juvenile process also is designed to evaluate the underlying reasons why a juvenile committed a violation and to connect the juvenile to resources to resolve issues such as parental neglect, mental illness, or alcohol or substance abuse.

When a juvenile is found to be unruly or delinquent because of truancy, the possible outcomes may include:

- Probation
- An order for counseling
- An order for drug or alcohol treatment
- Community service
- Placement in foster care or a group home
- Detention, but typically as a last option when a juvenile has a lengthy record

Habitual or chronic truancy also can affect a teenager's ability to get or keep a driver's license. Ohio law requires a school district to report habitual or chronic truancy to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. In turn, the BMV will suspend a student's learner's permit or driver's license, or bar them from getting a driver's license, until he or she turns 18 or the school district notifies the BMV that the student is attending school again.

If a child who is habitually or chronically truant is determined to be an unruly or delinquent juvenile, then Ohio Rev. Code 3321.38 allows you as a parent or guardian to be charged with the criminal offense of Contributing to the Unruliness or Delinquency of a Child. Section 3321.38 is the statute that prohibits a parent or guardian from failing to send a child to school.

If you're charged with contributing to the unruliness or delinquency of a juvenile, then Ohio Rev. Code 2919.24 says you may be convicted of a 1st degree misdemeanor. The penalty for a 1st degree misdemeanor includes up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000.

If your child is habitually or chronically truant, Ohio Rev, Code 3321.38 also allows you to be charged with the crime of Nonsupport of Dependents, also known as failure to provide adequate support. That's the same statute used to charge people who don't pay child support, but in the context of truancy the failure to make sure your child attends school can be considered a form of neglect and may result in a charge under Ohio Rev. Code 2919.21 (C).

The penalties for a conviction for nonsupport of dependents may include:

- 1st Degree Misdemeanor—A first offense is a 1st degree misdemeanor punishable by up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000. However, a judge may order you to community supervision, or probation, on a first offense.
- 5th Degree Felony—Nonsupport is a 5th degree felony punishable by 8 to 12 months in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500 when you are found to have failed to support a depending for 26 or more non-consecutive weeks.
- 4th Degree Felony — Nonsupport is a 4th degree felony punishable by 6 to 18 months of incarceration and a fine of up to \$5,000 when you have one or more prior felony convictions of nonsupport.

—Defense Lawyer Brad
Groene

Dropping out of school is a multi-generational problem. Not only are students who drop out of school likely to suffer the personal consequences of dropping out, such as lower lifetime income and worse overall health, but they are also more likely to see their own children drop out of school and suffer the same consequences. In addition, although children are particularly at risk of dropping out themselves in families where one or both parents are high school dropouts, the educational level of mothers may make a greater difference. A recent study of female students found that while the daughters of men who graduate from high school are 15% less likely to drop out of school than daughters whose fathers dropped out, the daughters of women who graduate from high school are one-third less likely to drop out of school than daughters of women who dropped out.

—*National Women’s Law
Center*

FACTORS CORRELATED WITH INCREASED RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Student & Family Characteristics

- Low socioeconomic status
- Single parent family
- Low level of parental involvement
- Race or ethnicity (Black, Hispanic and Native American students generally have increased odds, and Asian/Pacific Islander students decreased odds, compared to White students)
- Student Attitudes Toward & Experiences at School
- Being disciplined at school
- Poor grades
- Irrelevant coursework
- Lack of future educational plans
- Negative peer perceptions
- Being held back
- Frequently changing schools
- Absenteeism
- Feeling unsafe at school
- Working during school year
- Becoming pregnant or taking on parenting responsibilities

School Characteristics

- Public school
- Low average socioeconomic status of school community
- High levels of minority student enrollment
- High number of students discipline or held back
- A perceptions that the discipline policy is unfair

—*National Women’s Law
Center*

As efforts to remedy the high school dropout crisis progress, the educational experiences and dropout rates of female students must be recognized and understood. American girls are dropping out of high school at nearly the same rate as boys, and at significant cost. Female dropouts earn significantly lower wages than male dropouts, are at greater risk of unemployment, and are more likely to need to rely on public support programs. Moreover, studies suggest that barriers to high school graduation affect girls and boys in different ways and that some risk factors—particularly those related to pregnancy and parenting—are significantly more burdensome for female students. Further gender-based research and the incorporation of that research into dropout intervention strategies will be vital to improving girls’ graduation rates. With the future economic security of so many young women and their families at risk, educators, researchers and policymakers cannot afford to ignore the demonstrated particularities of girls’ educational experiences. Our young women deserve no less.

—*National Women’s Law
Center*

On a survey conducted by the *American Association of School Administrators* in which administrators were asked to indicate what they considered to be the most negative result of poor attendance, seven consequences ranked in order of importance from most important to least important were cited:

1. Permanent intellectual and/or vocational damage to student dropouts.
2. Overall lowering of academic standards and achievement in the school.
3. Frustration and morale problems experience by teachers.
4. Poor impression of the schools by the community at large.
5. Increased paperwork and record keeping for teachers and administrators.
6. Vandalism and petty crime perpetrated by truants.
7. Reduced state aid computed on the basis of average daily attendance.

—Dan L. Miller

Absenteeism is seen by school administrators as their major discipline problem.

—D. L. Duke

Truancy creates a severe morale problem. In class it is difficult for teachers to maintain a healthy climate if large blocks of students are continually absent. Students resent the situation when fellow students are truant because it slows up the class work.

—Doug Hoeft

Without significant extra help, it is obvious that almost all of the chronic truants will become dropouts.

—Doug Hoeft

There is a predictive relationship between high school truancy rates and alcohol problems, marital problems, criminality, job-related problems, and violence in adulthood. Problems in the military and lower earnings later in life were predicted by both elementary and secondary school truancy.

—Robins and Ratcliff

There is a significant relationship between incidences of truancy and incidences of adult anxiety, depression, hallucinations, and treatment for psychiatric problems.

—Robins and Ratcliff

Students who had no school problems in elementary school but became truants in high school, frequently began engaging in early sexual experimentation, drinking and drug abuse about the time they began truanting. This combination of behaviors forecasts dropping out of school, and after dropping out, a strong likelihood of continuing deviance and drug abuse. Such children who had no indicators of intellectual or social problems before exposure to the drug and alcohol scene in adolescence can be identified through the dramatic change in their attendance records. Given their early promise and their disastrous outcomes, if their truancy culminates in dropping out, they are a group for whom intervention is particularly appropriate.

—Robins and Ratcliff

‘Chronic absenteeism is a national problem,’ U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. said in a statement. ‘Frequent absences from school can be devastating to a child’s education. Missing school leads to low academic achievement and triggers drop outs. Millions of young people are missing opportunities in postsecondary education, good careers and a chance to experience the American dream.

—Evie Blad

About 19 percent of high school students missed 15 or more school days in 2013-14, compared to about 12 percent of middle school students and about 10 percent of elementary school students. That could be because high school students are more likely to be responsible for getting themselves to and from school. It also tracks with other research that shows students are less likely to be engaged academically as they age. Students with disabilities are more likely to be chronically absent. About 17 percent of students with disabilities were chronically absent compared to 12 percent of students without disabilities. And the disparity held at every grade level—elementary, middle, and high school. Perhaps related: Students with disabilities are also more likely to be suspended than their peers. In 2013-14, about 11 percent of K-12 students with disabilities were suspended at least once, compared to 5 percent of students without disabilities. American Indian students have the highest rates of absenteeism. While the problem of excessive school absences cuts across all racial and ethnic groups, some have higher rates than others. At the top of the list: 22 percent of American Indian students were chronically absent in 2013-14.

—Evie Blad

Chronic absenteeism is a national crisis, we must keep in mind that chronic absence is a solvable problem. Chronic absences can be addressed when educators and community groups join forces to educate families about the importance of avoiding unnecessary absences and helping students overcome challenges to getting to school, such as asthma, lack of dental care, unstable housing, unreliable transportation or neighborhood violence.

—Hedy Chang

A growing consensus of research points to chronic absence—defined by the national policy group *Attendance Counts* as missing 10 percent of school or more—as one of the strongest and most often overlooked indicators of a student’s risk of becoming disengaged, failing courses, and eventually dropping out of school. ‘Attendance doesn’t really rise to the top’ in school improvement discussions, said Jane Sundius, the director of the *Education and Youth Development Program* at the *Open Society Institute* in Baltimore, which coordinates and supports attendance and discipline-related research in the city. ‘We get into the cycle where [intervention] has to be about student achievement, so we get into the habit of just counting bodies for attendance. But all of a sudden, we have research that shows, in fact, attendance is a really remarkable indicator. It’s easy to understand; it’s available on every child, every week, every day; and it both predicts failure and acts as an early warning alert.’

—Sarah D. Sparks

Parents' attitudes about attendance can have a great impact on how well students will do in school, or even if they will be in school at all. A casual attitude about attendance is brutal.

—Douglas Hoefft

It's preferable that schools monitor the percentage of time each student spends in school rather than days missed. For example, if a student has missed 10 percent of the first month of school, this handful of days normally would not trigger alarm, but research suggests that the student is still at greater risk of being chronically absent by the end of the year.

If you're waiting for a kid to be 20 days absent, by that time it's too late. The whole value of monitoring this is you can see when there's a problem.

—Hedy N. Chang

Older students may be more selective about which classes they miss....students don't skip the classes of the interesting teachers, the ones who seem to care more about students. 'Kids don't go to the ones who don't teach us,' Ms. McCoy said. 'Some teachers might show you a problem on the board, but they're just teaching to the board, they're not really explaining it to you.'

—Erik W. Robelen

'It's important to get to the root of why students aren't coming to school and be able to align the solution with the problem,' says Gerry House, president of the *Institute for Student Achievement* and a former superintendent. 'If you take the punitive approach, more than likely you're not going to see any improvement in the attendance.' Students miss large amounts of school for a variety of reasons from chronic illness to caring for younger siblings to jobs, disinterest and behavioral issues. And academics success and, in some states, funding depend heavily on students being in class.

—Matt Zalaznick

You're not going to solve the problem in 10th grade because the problem has festered over the years—you're only going to solve one case out of 30 when it gets to that level. But if you can get kids in first and second grade reading proficiently, that's a leg up right away.

—Joe Vaverchak

Any time you have young people who are not in school, that is a negative drain on society as a whole. Often, we find truancy is a gateway to other forms of delinquency.

—Patrick Dobard

Many young, single mothers in New Britain and many families are struggling financially and can't afford basic necessities. On home visits, the specialists explain how attendance is connected to achievement, but they can also connect families with local agencies—such as the YMCA, police department and Boys & Girls Club—that can assist with health, clothing, transportation and other issues that keep students out of school. 'We're not coming into houses and putting the hammer down on somebody and saying we're here because you're going to be in trouble,' [Joe] Vaverchak says. 'We're there to talk about the issues we can help with.'

—Matt Zalaznick

The same risk factors that make students more likely to become chronically absent, such as poverty-related mobility or an unstable home life, only serve to intensify the problems caused by missing school.

—Sarah D. Sparks

Hedy N. Chang, an early-absenteeism researcher and the director of *Attendance Counts*, said high kindergarten absences are the norm nationwide, but tend to get less attention from educators and policymakers than secondary school truancy. Preschool and kindergarten absenteeism may be more prevalent, Ms. Chang said, because in many states kindergarten attendance is not mandatory and because parents and community members may not understand how early learning curriculum has changed in recent years.

'Kindergarten as an academic resource is a relatively new experience,' Ms. Chang said. 'Parents may think of their own experience, but kindergartners today are learning to read.'

Yet missing school early, when pupils are learning the most basic skills, can hamstring them in later grades and contribute to poor attendance throughout their academic careers.

—Sarah D. Sparks

Educators agree that improving attendance in the early grades requires a different approach from secondary school truancy interventions, because, as Mr. [Hedy] Chang put it, 'Most 5-, 6-, 7-year-olds, they're not home playing hooky.'

—Sarah D. Sparks

It's so easy to jump to a conclusion about why a child or a group of children are absent—'Oh, it's the parents' or 'It's the students'—but we have found in our research that it's really important to do some digging and find out what is going on.

—Katherine Eckstein

Young children's absences could trigger a ripple effect in families. If younger siblings had to stay home with a flu, asthma, or other ailment, frequently older siblings missed school, too, in order to watch them while the parents worked.

—Sarah D. Sparks

One in 10 kindergarten and 1st grade students misses at least a month of school every year, national research shows. In New York City, one in five elementary students falls into this category—a figure that led Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to launch pilot programs addressing the problem in 25 schools....This can't be labeled truancy in the early grades, since most 5- and 6-year-olds don't stay home without a parent's knowledge. It's chronic absence. Unexcused absences become a bigger problem in secondary school. But the bad attendance habits that lead to skipping school can become entrenched in the early years.

—Hedy Chang

National research shows that chronically absent kindergartners demonstrated lower academic performance than their peers once they got to 1st grade. For many low-income children, the poor performance persisted through 5th grade. A long-term study in Baltimore showed that many chronically absent 6th graders later dropped out of high school. In Chicago, poor attendance in 9th grade was a better predictor of dropping out than 8th grade test scores. When too many students miss too much school, the classroom churn starts to affect the entire class, as teachers repeat material to help children catch up. When state funding is linked to attendance, these absences mean schools get less money.

—Hedy Chang

Most schools don't look at chronic-absence patterns. They measure school-wide attendance—or they track truancy (unexcused absences). Neither figure captures all that's going on. For example, an elementary school of 400 students can have 95 percent of its students showing up every day and yet still have 60 children missing 18 days—or 10 percent of the school year. Further analysis can find that these students are concentrated in neighborhoods with no school bus service, in chaotic classrooms with an inexperienced teacher, or in communities with high asthma rates. Often, chronic absence is tied to poverty—to families who have no reliable transportation, little access to health care, and unstable housing, or no home at all. Understanding these patterns can lead to solutions—if we crunch and examine the numbers.

—Hedy Chang

While parents are certainly essential, schools partnering with community agencies can make a real difference when they work together. Some solutions are universal: educating parents and students about the importance of attendance and ensuring that every absence receives a response. Other solutions reflect particular challenges. One Bronx school found that chronic absence increased because Muslim students stayed home during Ramadan, lest they be tempted to break their fasts in the cafeteria. So the school hired a monitor for the Muslim students and set up a separate lounge. A school in Providence, R.I., found that some absentee students had parents who worked overnight shifts, then fell asleep before bringing their kids in. The school opened an early-morning program with breakfast, so that parents could drop children off before going home to sleep. Sometimes a child or a family needs special attention. Baltimore and Providence have programs to help with transportation for students who can't get to school, and to offer health services and counseling to families who need that support. In New York City, 15 homeless shelters will each have a point person paying attention to whether children there are making it to school. At its most intractable, truancy is a matter for the courts. There are dedicated truancy officers and court programs that can reach students when schools and communities fail to turn around poor attendance. But it's generally quicker and much less costly to start with preventive measures and targeted solutions.

—Hedy Chang

Sample Tardy Procedure: A student is tardy when that student enters the classroom door after the bell has rung. A student's tardiness is excused when he/she reports to class with an admit from the office marked 'Tardy Excused' or that student has a hall pass from another teacher. A student's tardiness is unexcused when he/she reports to class with an admit from the office marked 'Tardy Unexcused' or that student has no hall pass from another teacher.

—Dan L. Miller

Here are some parents' notes to teachers explaining why their kids were absent from school:

'Mary could not come to school because she is bothered by very close veins.'

'Please ackuse John for being absent on Jan. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33.'

'My daughter was absent yesterday because she was tired. She spent the weekend with the Marines.'

'Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault.'

—Casey Banas

MODEL PRINCIPAL'S LETTER TO THE PARENT OF A CHRONIC TRUANT

Dear Mrs. Sample:

As principal of Avalon Middle School I want you to know that I am very concerned about Robin's attendance in school. As of October 19, 2019 Robin has missed 16 days of the 32 days that school has been in session. I am concerned, given Robin's history of poor attendance in school, that she is being deprived of an education to the extent that she is simply not being given the chance to succeed in school. This deprivation will have a very negative effect on her later success in school and quite possibly her chance of being successful in a career or in life itself.

My second concern is that you are placing yourself in violation of the State of Illinois's mandatory law. Article 26, Section 11 of the Illinois School Code states that:

Any person who induces or attempts to induce any child to be absent from school unlawfully, or who knowingly employs or harbors, while school is in session, any child absent unlawfully from school for 3 consecutive school days, is guilty of a Class C misdemeanor.

Article 26, Section 10 states that:

Any person having custody or control of a child subject to the provisions of this article to whom notice has been given of the child's truancy and who knowingly and willfully permits such a child to persist in his truancy within that school year, upon conviction thereof shall be guilty of a Class C Misdemeanor and shall be subject to not more than 30 days imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$500.

I am concerned with Robin's attendance, Mrs. Sample, to the extent that I will pursue every avenue in trying to insure her daily attendance at school. Robin is expected to attend every class every day. If her attendance does not improve shortly, I will file a petition with the court concerning her truancy and/or file a report of child neglect with the Department of Children and Family Services.

In an effort to avoid taking these steps, I would like very much to work closely with you and Robin in a effort to design a program that would help to insure her regular attendance at school. Would you please meet with me on Friday, October 22, at 9:00 a.m. so that we may work together to see that Robin receives the education she deserves? If you need transportation to school, please let me know, and I will arrange for you to be picked up.

—Dan L. Miller,
Principal

There are a host of reasons why students stay away from classes cited in an AASA report on the issue: Babysitting. Having to help at home. Jobs. Family winter vacations. Pregnancy. Low achievement. Lack of gym clothes for gym classes. Mondays and Fridays.

—Casey Banas

Joseph Dean has spent much of his 10 years of life alone with his mother in a two-bedroom apartment in a South Side high-rise apartment complex. Many windows there are broken or boarded up, hallways are covered with grimy, flesh-colored paint, and some doors have as many as five locks.

Joseph has few friends and doesn't see them very often. 'He misses playing with his friends,' said his mother, a single parent on welfare. 'He keeps getting older and other kids are talking about school and he feels he's missing out.'

Joseph has never attended school regularly. His mother has not let him.

She claims that Joseph's childhood asthma started a series of physical and emotional problems for her son that made attendance at school impossible. He has missed 305 of 360 school days in the last two years at Christopher School, a facility for medically and physically handicapped youngsters. Joseph was transferred there after he failed to attend Ross School for two years before that.

'Its unfortunate that he hasn't been there [in school],' Mrs. Dean said, 'but I think I did the right thing.' She said she has kept Joseph home because the little boy was too tired, too sick and afraid to leave home and because she feared he would be exposed to germs from other children.

—Mary Elson

Truant officers, who are civil servants, say parents have kept children home:

- To do laundry and wash the family dishes.
- To prevent a divorced parent from stealing the child on his way to school.
- To keep a lonely parent company.
- To compensate for a parent's unhappiness over a broken marriage.
- To have the child work in a family-owned restaurant.
- To prevent an ill-behaved child from publicly embarrassing the family.
- Because a child is handicapped and the parents do not want to admit it.
- Because the child has no clothes.
- Because the parent is committing incest with the child.
- Because the parents have religious objections to education.

—Mary Elson

Poverty is a direct correlation to attendance and dropping-out. Probably because parents in poverty most likely did not finish high school either.

—Stephanie Hacker

A small percentage of parents... just don't care and others...are 'enablers' because they are more interested in being a buddy to their child rather than a parent. There are other issues involved. In today's economic climate, some parents are just so busy trying to make ends meet and put food on the table, they just don't have the time or energy for anything else.

—Larry Case

Parents need to be in control. Students learn by example. If a parent allows a child to stay home without a valid reason or stays home from work themselves without a good reason, then they are teaching by example that it's OK. Leading by example also includes vacations. Parents who check students out of school in order to take trips is really unacceptable. Trips should be planned around the school calendar. Also, parents who want to be a friend rather than disciplinarians are also doing a disservice to their child. I always say you can be their friend when they're 21, you need to be their parent now.

—Julie Altom

Surprisingly, we see a percentage of students who are absent over and over beginning with the 4-year-old program. Many of these same children continue to have significant patterns of absenteeism throughout elementary and middle school. By the time they get to high school and in many cases even sooner, they are behind their age peers and have little chance of graduating. We are all looking for answers. We have looked at research on the impact of students missing school. It has the most significant impact on test scores and grades of any issue. Truancy nearly always leads to failure to graduate on time or to graduate at all. Failure to attend school is the root cause of many, many problems.

—Ruth Ann Carr

Truancy can be a major impediment to children receiving a proper education. From time to time, certain parents are deficient in their responsibility to make their children attend school. Despite 'fair warnings' from school representatives, the Office of Juvenile Affairs, and the District Attorney's Office, these parents never seem to take this responsibility seriously. In such cases, criminal charges will be filed and will result in parents paying stiff monetary penalties. And if such parents fail to pay these penalties, then warrants will be issued for their arrests due to their failures to pay. All things considered, it is much easier and cheaper for parents to simply do the right thing by making sure their children attend school.

—Craig Ladd

Nine out of 10 students who missed five or more days in the first month went on to be chronically absent—defined as missing 10 percent of the school year in excused and unexcused absences—for the year.

—Hedy Chang, John
Gomperts,
& Leslie Boissiere

If poor attendance is allowed to persist, the impact can undermine children’s prospects for academic achievement. In the early grades, students who are chronically absent have lower reading and math scores, as well as weaker social emotional skills than they need to persist in school. In fact, in a study of California students for *Attendance Works*, the organization that Hedy Chang oversees, only 17 percent of the students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade were reading proficiently by 3rd grade, compared with 64 percent of those with good attendance in the early years. Weak reading skills in the 3rd grade translate into academic trouble ahead: Students who aren’t reading well by that point are four times more likely to drop out of high school, according to a 2012 study released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Chronic absence in middle school is another red flag that a student will drop out of high school. By high school, attendance is a better dropout indicator than test scores.

—Hedy Chang, John
Gomperts,
& Leslie Boissiere

Truancy, or unexcused absence from school, has been linked to serious delinquent activity in youth and to significant negative behavior and characteristics in adults. As a risk factor for delinquent behavior in youth, truancy has been found to be related to substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activities such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism.

—Bell, A.J., Rosen, L.A.,
and Dynlacht, D.

Left unaddressed, truancy during the preteen and teenage years can have significant negative effects on the student, schools, and society. It is important to identify promising strategies to intervene with chronic truants, address the root causes of truancy, and stop youth’s progression from truancy into more serious and violent behaviors.

—*U.S. Department of
Education*

THE CORRELATES OF TRUANCY FALL INTO FOUR BROAD CATEGORIES:

Family factors. These include lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic violence, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse in the home, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and differing attitudes toward education.

School factors. These include school climate issues—such as school size and attitudes of teachers, other students, and administrators—and inflexibility in meeting the diverse cultural and learning styles of the students. Schools often have inconsistent procedures in place for dealing with chronic absenteeism and may not have meaningful consequences available for truant youth (e.g., out-of-school suspension).

Economic influences. These include employed students, single-parent homes, high mobility rates, parents who hold multiple jobs, and a lack of affordable transportation and childcare.

Student variables. These include drug and alcohol abuse, lack of understanding of attendance laws, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties, and poor physical health.

Although not mentioned specifically, the community significantly influences the occurrence of truancy as well. **Community factors** are folded into the above four areas. For example, economic conditions and differing culturally based attitudes toward education are also important factors in the community.

—*U.S. Department of
Education*

Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure. Several studies have established lack of commitment to school as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school.

—Bell, A.J., Rosen, L.A.,
and Dynlacht, D.

Students cannot perform well academically when they are frequently absent. An individual student's low attendance is a symptom of disengagement and academic difficulties. But when many students have low attendance in classes, such behavior undermines the capacity of all students and teachers to pursue high quality education.

—*Student Life in High Schools Project*

Attendance Matters! – New Research supports the unquestionable link between attendance and student achievement. Students who attend school between 85 and 100 percent of the time pass the state tests in reading and math at much higher rates than students who attend school less than 85 percent of the time.

—*Minneapolis Public Schools*

The U. S. Department of Education's online training document: 'Truancy: a serious problem for students, schools, and society' puts the range of causes of school attendance problems into a framework. That document categorizes 'Factors that Contribute to Truancy' as follows:

I. School Factors

- School safety
- School size
- Attitudes of school staff and fellow students
- Flexibility in meeting students' diverse learning styles
- Failure to successfully notify parents/guardians about each absence
- Lack of consistency and uniformity to attendance and attendance policy within schools and districts

II. Family Factors

- Lack of parent supervision and/or guidance
- Poverty
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws
- Varied education priorities

III. **Economic Factors**

- Student employment
- Single-parent households
- Parents with multiple jobs
- Families that lack affordable transportation and/or child care

IV. **Student Factors**

- Substance use
- Limited social and emotional competence
- Mental health problems
- Poor physical health
- Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws
- Teen pregnancy
- Truant friends

*—U. S. Department of
Education*

From a psychological perspective, one way to understand truancy and dropouts is in terms of three psychological needs that theorists posit as major intrinsic motivational determinants of behavior. These are the need to feel competent, the need to feel self-determining, and the need to feel interpersonally connected. From this perspective, truancy can be viewed as among the negative outcomes that result when these needs are threatened and thwarted. And, such needs are regularly threatened and thwarted by the prevailing culture of schools.

‘It’s too hard;’ ‘it’s unfair;’ ‘You can’t win;’ ‘No one seems to care’ – all are common comments made by students (and staff) They are symptoms of a culture that demands a great deal and too often fails to provide essential supports. It is a culture that undermines motivation. Each day students bring with them a wide variety of needs, and where these are not effectively met. They find themselves in situations where they chronically feel over-controlled and less than competent. They also come to believe they have little control over long-range outcomes, and this affects their hopes for the future. And, all too common is a sense of families. The result: not only don’t they experience feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others, such feelings tend to be undermined. This leads to disengagement from school learning. And, it should surprise no one that disengaged students manifest a range of behavior, learning, and emotional problems and tend not to want to come to school.

*—U. S. Department of
Education*

Periods of transition can increase school attendance problems for all students and especially for some. Students and their families are involved in important transitions every day and throughout the years of schooling. Examples of such transition periods include:

- Entry into school at kindergarten
- Moving to a new home and entry into a new school
- Beginning a new year in a new class
- Articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
- Re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
- Inclusion from special education to regular education

Transitional failure can lead to school absences. Such failures can be viewed as stemming from factors related to the environment, person, or both. For example, school systems and individual schools are quite variable in the degree to which they are prepared to address the transitional needs of different subgroups of students, such as those who are highly mobile and recent immigrants. Some new students enter friendly and inviting settings; others encounter settings that are nonaccommodating or even hostile. And, of course, newcomers vary in terms of their capability and motivation with respect to psychological transition into new settings (e.g., some did not want to move, some are shy, some are uninterested in learning new ways).

—*UCLA Center for
Mental Health in
Schools*

The Chicago Public Schools defines a student as truant if s/he has an unexcused absence on any given day, and a chronic truant if s/he has unexcused absences more than 10 percent of the days in a school year. The CPS has two truancy problems – a problem of students who do not attend school and a problem of students who attend more or less regularly and then cut classes. These are two distinct behaviors which require different approaches by schools...Cutting classes and not going to school are vicious cycles. These behaviors become habits that are hard to break. A student may not go to class initially because he/she doesn't like the teacher, is having academic difficulty, has friends who pressure him/her to stay at lunch, or didn't do the homework for the day. Without immediate reaction from school staff or other adults, cutting becomes an option rather than facing that teacher or making-up homework. Eventually, when a student returns to class, he/she realizes that he/she is very far behind..

— *Chicago Public Schools*

Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments.

—*Northwest Regional
Educational
Laboratory*

It is often said that school attendance is both a right and a responsibility. Certainly, those of us who value education can readily agree with this. And, for students who are absent from school because of circumstances over which they have no control, society has to play a greater role in addressing barriers that are abridging their rights.

However, there are some students who do not experience school as right for them and, therefore, see school not as a right or a responsibility but as an infringement on their self-determination. From a psychological perspective, the problem becomes motivational (e.g., avoidance motivation, reactance). Therefore, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than the prevailing ones used by most schools and the society in general.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, it is essential to avoid lumping all youngsters together. A particular danger arises when the problem is truancy. Some truancy is reactive and some is proactive, and the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably in both cases.

Ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches can be adapted from current efforts. But, policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect the complexity of attendance problems. The complexity demands moving to more comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated solutions. Focusing only on ‘What’s wrong with that kid!’ often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to policies and practices that are not making significant inroads. School attendance problems provide another indication of the need to move forward in new directions for student support.

—*UCLA Center for
Mental Health in
Schools*

AN ALTERNATIVE EVENING SCHOOL FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 10:00 P.M. FOUR EVENINGS A WEEK

Entrance to the evening high school requires approval of the day school’s guidance co-ordinators and, with the exception of ‘financial need’ as the primary reason for entrance, candidates must have been enrolled in all appropriate alternatives prior to consideration for evening school enrollment. The school serves:

- Those students who need, or feel they need, full time employment.
- Older high school students who have reached their 5th year or have been out of school for a substantial length of time.
- Mature girls who have been employed full time, are dating older young men, and who seem to have matrimony as an immediate goal.
- Day school students who apparently cannot cope with the length of the school day or with the eight ‘passing’ periods.
- Day school students who have not succeeded in any of our many alternative day programs and seem ready to drop out.

The evening high school has helped between 90-95% of the students achieve acceptable attendance and academic performance levels each semester. Many of the students have entered the evening school with unacceptable records. Parents and students have both indicated great satisfaction with the program and parents in particular are pleased with their child’s success. Here are some of the reasons for success:

1. The ability of the evening high school student to find desirable day employment, maintain the job and still meet school demands.

2. Smaller class size allows individual attention and adjustment; the small school size allows individual attention, the need for few rules, and prevents the 'loss' of needed reaction.
3. Warm, empathetic, positive teachers are employed, who constantly reinforce successful acceptable behavior and effort,
4. Students, 16 and over, are treated as adults: They are allowed to make decisions regarding their attendance and academic effort, allowed to pass/fail, attend or not attend, work or not work, provided they do not hinder the progress of other students or the efforts of the teachers.
5. Students over 16 are not administratively punished for truancy. Their grades decline on a pre-set scale, and this seems to lessen student hostility.
6. The one passing period lessens the distraction and misdirection of the student.

—Robert Watt,
Glenbrook High
School, Glenview,
Illinois

There are so many efforts at school reform, but what people overlook is that none of them work if the kids don't show up.

—Marie Groark

As early as sixth grade, we could have known that kids were on the train to drop out, and too often our efforts in the past began when it was too late.

—John Feinblatt

What child hasn't dreaded September, the end of summer and the return to school. But for some kids, the prospect of school produces a level of fear so intense that it is immobilizing, resulting in what's known as school-refusal behavior. These are the kids who may be absent for weeks or months. Some may cry or scream for hours every morning in an effort to resist leaving home. Others may hide out in the nurse's office. Some kids who miss school are simply truant—they'd just rather be doing something else. And sometimes there are genuine reasons to fear school, because of bullying, for example. But in about two-thirds of cases, a psychiatric problem, most commonly an anxiety disorder, is the cause, according to research led by Christopher A. Kearney, professor and director of clinical training at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas....For kids with anxiety-fueled school refusal, the fear is real and can take time to overcome. Families may struggle for months to help a child get back into the classroom. Ignoring the problem, or failing to deal with it completely, can lead to more-serious problems later on.

—Andrea Petersen

There might have been 35 kids theoretically in my class, but on any given day, only 20, 25 were there, and it wasn't the same 20 or 25 from one day to the next, so we were always playing catchup.

—Marie Groark

School refusal 'takes the child off their developmental course.' They are not going to grow in an age-appropriate way.

—Anne Marie Albano

Kids with school-refusal behavior may have separation anxiety, a fear of being away from their parents, or a social phobia, an inordinate fear of being judged, being called-on in class or being teased. A specific phobia— fear of riding the bus, walking past a dog or being out in a storm—may be present. Other children are depressed, in some cases unable to get out of bed. Because many kids complain of headaches, stomachaches or other physical symptoms, it can be difficult to tell whether anxiety, or a physical illness, is to blame. One indicator: Anxiety-fueled ailments tend to disappear magically on weekends.

—Andrea Petersen

In February 2009, Kathy Jones's youngest son, Garrett, then 10, started complaining of headaches. Doctors prescribed migraine medication, but it didn't help and Garrett began begging to miss school. 'Every single day there was a reason he shouldn't have to go to school. He'd say, 'Mom, I'm sick, my head hurts, I'm sure I have the flu, my teacher hates me, I hate my teacher,' says Ms. Jones, who lives in Las Vegas. By April, she had quit her job and was going to school with her son, pulling up a chair next to his desk. 'He was the star of the football team, the guitar player, a straight-A student—and now, the minute we'd step into the parking lot he'd shake and start to cry.'

—Andrea Petersen

MODEL STUDENT ATTENDANCE PROGRAM

Philosophy: Jefferson Junior High School is committed to the philosophy that every student should attend every class every day. Regular attendance and promptness are expected in all classes and are essentials of good performance of any job. Learning to participate in group discussions, developing an appreciation for the views and abilities of other students, and forming the habit of regular attendance to one's tasks are legitimate objectives of any course. Learning that is lost due to absence can never be adequately replaced. Each student should be aware that attendance is part of his or her evaluation in each class, A student should understand that excessive absences, whether excused or unexcused, will drastically affect the class grade.

Parent/Student Responsibilities

1. Parents should encourage good school attendance.
2. Parents should see that their children attend school every day and on time.
3. The only reason a child should be kept home is for an illness serious enough to prevent the child from completing the school day.
4. Should the child be kept home for illness, the parent is to call the school office on that morning to report the absence. If the parent forgets to call, they may write a note for the student when the student returns to school.
5. Students are responsible for reporting to each class on time every day.

Teacher Expectations

1. Set an example—be in school every day.
2. Closely follow through on all building attendance procedures and make up work policies.
3. Be strict and consistent—insist that students attend daily and arrive on time.
4. Insure that you use good classroom management techniques and effective teaching techniques. Use variety in your methods. Make class special. Learn something new every day and make class an experience students can't afford to miss.
5. Conduct special projects or particularly interesting assignments on Mondays and Fridays when absenteeism tends to be highest.
6. Design a more difficult make-up test for students who are absent on test days to encourage all students to be present and take tests the first time around.
7. Reinforce good attendance in all contacts with parents—open house, progress reports, letters, phone calls, etc,
8. Phone parents of repeated absentees and discuss the importance of work missed and the need to promptly make-up work missed.
9. Be friendly and greet students in a personable manner as they enter your class. Keep your room clean, and decorate your room to create a pleasant working atmosphere.
10. Give impromptu quizzes.
11. Create a reward system for good attendance.
12. Help to improve punctuality by having something for students to do when they first get to class.
13. On the last school day of each month, issue two good news certificates to each student in your homeroom who has had perfect attendance for the month.

—Dan L. Miller

School attendance at the high school level is a long-standing problem affecting student achievement in many school districts across the nation. Fights, vandalism, and a rash of other negative behavior can be traced to truancy and the habitual skipping of classes.

Schools are a microcosm of the communities in which they are located. The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of students mirror the values and customs of adults in the same locale.

The research cites a number of reasons for student truancy and absenteeism:

- Poverty (inadequate clothing)
- Boredom
- Peer group influence
- Poor academic background and daily preparation
- Apathy of parents, students, community, teachers, and administrators
- Poorly constructed policies on discipline and attendance
- Inconsistent enforcement of rules by administrators and teachers
- Lack of support from central administration and board
- Poor curriculum
- Poor parent-teacher communication
- Lack of pride and sense of responsibility on part of students and staff.

—Clarence L. Stone

What Can Be Done?

1. Local school boards have the responsibility and authority to establish reasonable and enforceable rules to govern student conduct. For rules to be enforceable, community support must exist. The building principal, with central office support, must involve all who are affected by attendance rules in their examination, revision, and/or construction.
2. Principals must see that well-developed rules and regulations governing attendance are in place and consistently enforced. Rules should be regularly examined by staff, parents, and students to ensure fairness and appropriateness.
3. Teachers are the key to any improvement effort. Principals must assist teachers to become better classroom managers. Effective classroom management facilitates effective teaching and good student attendance.
4. Teachers with good student attendance and punctuality records should be used as mentors for teachers who are having difficulty. Teachers should receive recognition for motivating students to attend class and to be on time.

5. Principals should conduct regular inservice for students, staff, and parents on attendance procedures. Ensure that everyone knows the rules.
6. Principals and teachers should examine successful attendance programs in the district or area. Adopt those features that will be useful in your school and community. Consider automatic dialing systems to contact homes. Check first with schools using these systems before purchasing them.

—Clarence L. Stone

Strategies for Better Attendance

Students will go to class if they experience good classroom management and good teaching. Students want structure if it is positive and supportive. The following are reasons students regularly cite for punctual class attendance.

- The class is interesting; I don't feel lost; I can keep up; it's not boring.
- There is something for you to do when you get to class; you don't have time to sit and talk with friends.
- My parents insist that I go and that I be on time.
- The teacher makes the class special; you learn something new every day; you can't afford to miss it.
- My teachers care about me; they want me to learn.
- The teachers are strict and consistent; they insist that you be on time and that you attend daily.
- Teachers enforce rules without favorites; rewards and punishment are given as appropriate.
- Teachers give impromptu quizzes.
- Teachers mark attendance promptly and consistently.

Principals can have a significant impact by supporting strategies that encourage a high level of class attendance and punctuality:

1. Teachers should establish reasonable rules and apply them consistently.
2. Teachers should check attendance promptly each day.
3. Teachers should greet each student daily in a personal way.
4. Classroom instruction should be appropriate for student capabilities.
5. Teachers should establish a reward system for 'good' attendance.
6. Principals and teachers should get to know parents. Letters should be sent to parents at the beginning of the year reinforcing concern for good attendance.
7. Teachers should make follow-up calls to parents when students are frequently absent.

8. Students with habitual attendance problems should be referred to counselors, attendance staff, or administration promptly enough for positive interventions.

—Clarence L. Stone

Warning systems exist to keep us out of harm's way. The car's dashboard light warns of low tire pressure; the urgent weather bulletin advises us to evacuate ahead of a storm. We are conditioned to take these warnings seriously and act upon them.

Now, just weeks into the new school year, another warning system is sending a message to parents and educators: the early signs of chronically absent students. Half of all students who miss two to four days of school in the first month will go on to miss nearly a month of school in excused or unexcused absences, according to a study released in July by the *Baltimore Education Research Consortium*.

The study examined chronic absence and found a striking pattern. Remarkably, nine out of 10 students who missed five or more days in the first month went on to be chronically absent—defined as missing 10 percent of the school year in excused and unexcused absences—for the year.

So, even though it's only October, we already know which students are most at risk. The warning lights are blinking. The alerts are flashing before us. What happens if we disregard them?

If poor attendance is allowed to persist, the impact can undermine children's prospects for academic achievement. In the early grades, students who are chronically absent have lower reading and math scores, as well as weaker social-emotional skills than they need to persist in school.

—Hedy Chang

Chronic absence in middle school is another red flag that a student will drop out of high school. By high school, attendance is a better dropout indicator than test scores. It's a particular problem for children from low-income families, who often face significant barriers to getting to school. They may have little access to health care to control the asthma that keeps them home, or they may live in housing that contributes to their health problems. They may face a dangerous walk to school, either because of community violence or traffic patterns.

Other students are being pushed out of school by strict discipline policies. After all, days missed due to suspensions are absences, too. And these disciplinary absences fall disproportionately on children of color, costing them valuable instructional time and exacerbating achievement gaps.

—Hedy Chang

Reducing chronic absence is good not only for students, but also for our schools. As taxpayers, we already pay for the school buildings and the teachers needed to educate our children. We're spending time and money to expand early education and improve 3rd grade reading so that we can increase our graduation rates. Why not do everything we can to ensure that students show up every day and make the most of our investments?

—Hedy Chang

Perhaps the most notorious school-skippers, real or fictional, are Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer — characters brought into being by their similarly adventure-seeking creator, Samuel Clemens, or Mark Twain. Tom and Huck (and Twain) were all about escape and freedom. When Huckleberry Finn went to live with the Widow Douglas, she took him for a son and allowed she would 'sivilize' him. We all know how successful she was. Huck could not be 'sivilized.' All he wanted to do was head out for a smoke and get out of his rigid, confining clothes.

Huck has never been alone in wanting to live free. There have always been many like him, and that is why we have compulsory education laws. Early 'sivilized' communities recognized that the only way to keep students in school up to a certain age was to make them go. (Massachusetts was the first, in 1852, to mandate compulsory attendance for children between the ages of 8 and 14.) Compulsory attendance laws specify the age for starting school and the age at which students may follow Huck outdoors for adventure without getting dragged back in by the ear. In doing so, these laws not only make the kids go to school, but put pressure on parents to get them there.

—Kathy Christie

Critics say that forcing students to attend school is counterproductive, that students who don't want to be there often become disruptive influences. They claim that it's more important for schools to improve the educational experience for students who are disengaged or so far behind their peers that they cannot see a way to catch up. For too many students, the light has gone out, and they see no reason to attend. A system of credits based on seat time, or Carnegie Units, does not lend itself to helping students make up for time lost during months or years of adolescent disengagement.

Proponents say that raising the compulsory attendance age decreases dropout rates, juvenile crime, and teen pregnancy, while it produces graduates who — because they hold at least a high school diploma — can earn higher wages over the course of their lifetimes.

—Kathy Christie

The consequences of class cutting can be as serious as those of full-day truancy. Law enforcement officials receive complaints about student loitering and vandalism. Teachers report difficulty in maintaining their instructional schedules when so many students miss class. Counselors indicate that students fail classes because of excessive absences. Students who fail several times realize that they cannot graduate with their class, and then drop out of school.

—*The NASSP
Practitioner*

The reasons for the large number of selective absences are not hard to find. High school campuses became more open in the late 1960s and 1970s, and students enjoyed increased access to automobiles. Students began to take advantage of these new opportunities to meet away from classrooms or to leave the school grounds for part of the day, sometimes to visit local shopping malls and fast-food stores. This produced an increase in class cutting.

—*The NASSP
Practitioner*

IMPOSING PENALTIES FOR UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

Administrators use various penalties to deter students from whole-day truancy and selective class cutting. Schools may disenroll students after an established number of consecutive days of unexcused absence. Parents must then re-enroll them to return to school. Many administrators are reluctant to disenroll students, primarily because it is not a useful deterrent to truancy. Most administrators prefer to focus on less drastic and more suitable penalties. There are two types: academic and administrative.

1. Academic penalties are regarded as the natural consequence of absence—losing points for a quiz given or homework due, poor performance on a test covering the period of absence, and a resulting lower grade in the class. Some teachers, in addition, artificially lower the grades of students with excessive absenteeism. This controversial practice is often officially prohibited, but some districts or schools seem to tolerate it. A more severe penalty is reduction in credit; not only the grade, but the number of credits earned, is reduced. Some schools have experimented with a policy of disenrolling a student from a specific class after reaching a predetermined number of unexcused absences. This policy, however, has been successfully challenged by advocates for students. In general, academic penalties are effective only with students who are concerned about their academic records.

2. Schools have developed administrative penalties to deter even academically uncommitted students. The following are typical:

Assigning detention after school; Requiring that students have a routing slip signed each day by all teachers and a parent; Excluding students from participation in cocurricular activities, including school athletic teams; Requiring that students attend Saturday school; and Suspending students from school.

Several obstacles exist to using penalties as deterrents. The practice requires accurate and timely records of all unexcused absences. It also requires a staff willing to play a police role. Many teachers and counselors dislike imposing penalties or reporting truant behavior. Some parents vigorously protest the penalties, especially exclusion from team sports and Saturday school.

Administrative penalties possess a drawback similar to academic penalties. They work for the occasional class cutter who is fully integrated into the school community, but not so well for the chronic truant who is indifferent to membership in that community. Suspension from school may even be a reward for the alienated student.

A basic problem with all penalties is that they use aversion to punishment to force students to participate in school. They do not build positive motivation. The coerced attendee becomes the classroom teacher's discipline problem. Many teachers prefer that these students not come to school.

In addition, the imposition of penalties is restricted by the legal requirements of due process. Appeals and reviews can prolong conflict and preoccupy administrators who come to resent the disproportionate call on their time for these unrewarding activities.

For all these reasons, administrators are increasingly seeking alternatives to coercive penalties. They are developing positive interventions to increase student commitment to school.

—*The NASSP
Practitioner*

Some school administrators ask teachers to confront students immediately following absences and to refer chronic truants promptly to counselors. Some require counselors to review the attendance records of their particular group of students, call in individual students as warranted, and develop short lists of students to be monitored on a weekly or even daily basis.

Administrators themselves often become involved in the monitoring and counseling of chronic truants. This can create a role conflict. Insofar as these administrators are responsible for imposing penalties, they can be torn between personal caring and their obligation to enforce the rules impartially. Some administrators seek to resolve this dilemma by balancing strict enforcement of penalties with efforts to reform a curriculum that is not working for these students. Some schools operate special programs for chronic truants and other at-risk students. The students are organized into a smaller community within the school. They attend classes together.

Their teachers function as their advisers. These special programs, like continuation schools, have a simplified curriculum and focus on building a positive climate to motivate students to stay in school. These alternatives attempt to change the school as well as the student.

Some administrators are using positive motivational techniques for the whole school to improve school spirit and reduce the number of dropouts. They endeavor to build satisfying experiences for students in all aspects of school life—academics, athletics, and social activities. They believe that daily success will motivate students to attend regularly.

—*The NASSP
Practitioner*

Parents are not always cooperative with monitoring efforts. Some parents refuse to respond to school phone calls about their student's absences. Some are indulgent in writing excuses for non-legitimate reasons. Some even lie to the school to protect their offspring. This problem highlights the importance of efforts to inform parents from the outset of legitimate reasons for absence and to confront parents who send phony excuses.

Resistance and inconsistency can plague the penalty process. Teachers vary greatly in willingness to impose academic penalties for absence. Some teachers seek to protect students from administrative sanctions. Others overuse administrative referrals to rid their classes of unwanted students. Any inconsistencies in imposing penalties for truant behavior can lead students to believe they are immune or to complain about perceived unfairness of treatment.

School administrators sometimes find that teachers are less than enthusiastic about winning over chronic truants. Teachers may see their work as easier and more productive when truants are permanently absent. Administrators are sometimes frustrated by parents who disregard communications from the school, or when confronted, plead helplessness. Of courses, parents of chronic truants may have personal and social problems. Unfortunately, administrators are expected to take responsibility for conditions beyond their ability to influence.

—*The NASSP
Practitioner*

There is little doubt that truancy is one of the, most destructive forces in Illinois education today. For years teachers and administrators have felt that it had a direct effect on problems such as vandalism, community crime, the drop-out rate, student-family conflict, teacher morale, school finances, as well as other areas. Yet it is very difficult to objectively verify that these feelings are accurate. Truancy is a subject that is often discussed on a philosophical level because few have the time to study the subject in detail.

—Douglas Hoeft

Sounds like a punch line: The key to success in high school? Showing up. But new research pegged freshman attendance the No. 1 predictor—more than poverty, gender or race—of whether students ultimately graduate. Basic as it is, that information could be revolutionary in Chicago Public Schools, where the average freshman racked up 19.6 days—a month of school—in cut classes. That fist-ever tally helps explain a scandalous 56 percent graduation rate. The data should send high schools scrambling for all means available to get freshmen in the classrooms where they belong. True, some schools already are on the job, with orientation programs to rival swanky private schools and peer mentoring from upperclassmen to keep freshmen on the straight and narrow. The district offers incentives ranging from iPods to cars. Parents, are you listening? Tempting as it is to slack off supervision as children get older, it's imperative to make sure they get to school on time and attend every class. Here's some handy intelligence: Students were most likely to cut first period, last period and the class after lunch, according to the *Consortium on Chicago School Research* at the University of Chicago. Many ditched classes they didn't like or weren't doing well in. You might think that's just typical teen-age behavior. But over time it adds up like a high-interest credit card debt. And too many high school students never dig themselves out.

John Easton, one of the authors of the study, showed the numbers to parents last week.

'People gasp,' he said. 'You look at the graphs, and it's like a cliff. You go to that second week of absence and kaboom!'

Scariest, even high-scoring elementary students are prone to failure in high school if they get off on the wrong foot. But if there is a silver lining, it is this: Even students who struggled in elementary school get a fresh start toward success if they have good attendance starting their freshman year in high school.

—Richard Laurent

The habitual absentee must experience some successes in order to change behavior. And the successes must come with people as well as with work. Therefore, begin by trying to do some connecting. If the student relates to you, attendance will improve. Thus, to change the behavior of the student, you must make a difficult professional judgment: Make this student an exception. If you cannot make a temporary exception for this student, he or she may find no reason for coming to class. This adjustment involves both our attitudes and actions. The real issue is the need for the student to demonstrate competency level in the work missed. If this student is required to 'complete every missed assignment,' he or she may drop out of school altogether. Remember, the student who has fallen behind is facing a double burden: making up the incomplete or missed work—and keeping up with the current as-

signments. In essence, the student must do double work. Sometimes the best way to help this student is to reduce the length of makeup assignments.

Make your first goal getting this student to attend class. Then, work on today's lesson only. Next, carefully begin working on selecting the work he or she must know in order to master the present curriculum. Remember, people do what works for them. And, at present, being absent works better for this student than attending class. Therefore, you must make coming to class work for him or her.

Talk about the need to be in class tomorrow. It's harder for the student to stay away from class if you and the student are connecting and he or she is aware that something significant is happening in class. Do everything you can to create the feeling that something important happens in class every day.

To make tomorrow important, try these techniques—one at a time: First, give the student a special assignment. Second, make contact with the student about something significant as often as you can. Third, give him or her an important daily task. Fourth, never ignore the student—or fail to talk to him or her. If the student stops showing up for class, take quick action. Call parents immediately. Inform the counselors, nurse, and administrator immediately. Check with other school personnel to determine whether they are aware of any special problems. If they are not, then schedule a meeting with the student to discuss the situation. Try to settle the issue quickly and positively, without fanfare. Above all, inform the student of the steps you are taking to resolve the problem.

Fifth, while not accepting the behavior, always accept the student. In the process, never compare this student with classmates, especially in terms of evaluation, And never force him or her to become defensive by saying 'You are your own worst enemy.' This student cannot take such confrontation until he or she is experiencing success.

—Robert L. DeBruyn

Habitual absenteeism doesn't start overnight—and it can't be cured overnight. Records often reveal that absenteeism started several years before and was allowed to go unchecked—often with parental permission. That is why we must talk to parents about the reason behind the absenteeism—as well as the importance of regular attendance. After all, some parents think it's OK for a child to miss school. Therefore, we should always emphasize that repeated absences jeopardize a student's chances of achieving success and lead to poor habits for the world of work. We must make sure that this child knows we care about him or her as a person—as well as about his or her being in class. And we can't ignore this student when he or she does come to school. Rather, we must welcome the student back to class after an absence. This action can do much to build a stronger pupil-teacher relationship. We must let the student know that he or she was missed and that we are glad he or she is back. Comments such as 'We had a good discussion yesterday; we missed you' or 'You were needed for the dodgeball game at recess yesterday' show the student he or

she is important. Such actions also help the student like his or her teacher. In the final analysis, this may be the most important factor of all in changing the behavior.

—Robert L. DeBruyn

It's hard to predict which students will drop out, say some researchers, because the reasons are varied and rooted in a student's personal or family circumstances. However, except for high absenteeism, the traditional risk factors—such as living in a single-parent household, having a low income, or being a latchkey child— aren't necessarily the most powerful predictors for dropping out, says Mark Dynarski, a researcher at Mathematical Policy Research, Inc., who has evaluated federal dropout prevention programs. 'The students who seem relatively stable can get suddenly shaky. They may not even have risk factors, but something could happen at home or in their lives,' Dynarski says. Although a teacher or counselor might see signs of distress, schools often don't have a way of channeling such-elusive information that can change weekly. Teachers would have to be comfortable providing regular feedback to a counselor and hit the window at the right time,' to prevent such students from leaving school, Dynarski says.

—Rick Allen

With good curriculum alignment, teachers have more time to focus a lesson, make the content more engaging, and tie it to assessments, so that students are more likely to pass the tests. If alignment is working, then students are more successful academically and less likely to be discouraged and drop out. Efforts to keep students engaged are not limited to the classroom. Motivating students through extracurricular activities can help them see school as a positive social experience. Encourage all students, especially beginning in middle school, to get involved in at least one extracurricular activity.

—Rick Allen

Certain assumptions pertain to the overview of truancy. First of all we assume truancy is not only illegal but maladaptive. That is, in the long run, the truant loses more than he gains. To extend that, let us say that the systems involved in truancy all lose more than they gain. The truant retards his own potential development, the school and parents lose the gratification inherent in achieving educational goals and performing stated functions, the school may lose funds and the community may lose a contributing citizen. I say may because by definition Albert Einstein was a truant and his parents could today have been taken to court. Systemically, truancy can be viewed as a deterrence of a process in motion; an inability on the part of the subunits of the system to function effectively. The decision to examine the fact of truancy and strategize for change is a declaration to that effect, which declaration is to some extent supported by all parts of the system. This leads to assumption number two which is: all parts of the system would prefer success to failure—all things be-

ing equal. Schools intend to educate, teachers intend to teach, parents intend for their children to be educated and students intend to learn. How then can truancy exist? Only when the intentions of one or more parts of the system are aborted can truancy exist.

—Jeanne Robinson

School attendance usually is congruent with parental wishes and ideals. Truancy then can be viewed as a challenge to that particular ideal. It may also be considered a foray into the area of testing behaviors in relation to the authority of the educational system. In this way the parents and school may become an amalgamated object to the student. As an amalgam, the parent/school team comprise a potentially formidable 'opponent' for the truant. Divide and conquer may become the strategy wherein the truant's efforts are toward preventing cooperative interaction between parent and school for the purpose of maintaining his own sense of mastery. This is only a sense of mastery. Real mastery would not require such tactics. The challenge to external authority is a necessity in life. It is the nature and effectiveness of the challenge which must be examined. In order to respond effectively to this challenge, the 'opponent team' must have come to terms with their own authority and that of others. They act as models to the truant on the various levels of educated persons and interacting persons. Invariably truant behavior begins as a test. The pattern of truancy develops because it appears to be an effective mechanism for dealing with internal and interpersonal anxieties. The maintenance of the pattern depends upon a confirming feedback loop which supports this mythical solution. Because of the complexities of adolescence, each truant's particular issues must be studied; I am suggesting this commonality among truants: the behavior represents an attempt to deal with an anxiety state which includes problematic relationship systems.

—Jeanne Robinson

The identity of the truant is at risk. Truancy is a personal decision to declare oneself a failure. For most students who have attended school through pre-adolescence, there is some level of acceptance of education as a positive goal. There is an awareness that present society requires the completion of minimum education as one of the prerequisites for successful adulthood. To relinquish the educational goal necessitates the denial of a part of self. It is an imminent death which must be mourned. As with any mourning, the loss may be denied, raged against, scorned or 'ignored'. It will not go unnoticed nor be forgotten. I have talked with adults in their 30s, 40s and 50s who continue to mourn the loss of their intellectual strivings. Of course from the retrospective position, they can more realistically consider the loss/death of a part of themselves. Sometimes they can complete that mourning and reawaken those strivings. At best they have been dormant. At worst the strivings have died in their sleep.

The self denial involved in the giving up of educational goals is what is meant by an identity at risk. To obliterate or deny one of the major aspects of identity, is making

a decision to retard one's own growth. This is not to suggest that completion of a traditional high school program is necessary for all students. It is to suggest that failure to acknowledge one's educational potential and implement a realistic plan for its completion leads to an identity deficit.

—Jeanne Robinson

MODEL LETTER TO ALL PARENTS REGARDING ATTENDANCE

Jefferson's Absent-Minded Students

Although Jefferson is as good a school or better than any other school in the district, there is one area in which Jefferson rates dead last—attendance. Each month average daily attendance percentages are figured for each school in the district. Jefferson's daily attendance averages between 86 and 89 percent, which makes Jefferson the school with the lowest rate of attendance in District #60.

On the average, a school can count on 4% of its students being absent on any given day due to illness. Absence beyond the 4% level is usually due to reasons other than illness. The most common reason for absences beyond the 4% level is truancy. On a typical day at Jefferson, therefore, there might be as many as 50-60 of our 500 students absent, with approximately 40 of those absences due to truancy.

The staff at Jefferson has set as its building goal this year the improvement of our students' attendance. There are a number of things we can do to improve attendance, but the greatest effort to get the child to school must be made by the parent and by the individual student. We at Jefferson are committed to the philosophy that every student should attend every class every day. Regular attendance and promptness are expected in all classes and are essentials of good performance of any job. Learning to participate in group discussions, developing an appreciation for the views and abilities of other students, and forming the habit of regular attendance to one's tasks are legitimate objectives of any course. Learning that is lost due to absence can never be adequately replaced.

I would encourage all parents, therefore, to discuss this philosophy with their children and to impress upon them the importance of good school attendance.

Secondly, I would ask you as parents to do everything you possibly can to insure that your child gets to school on time every day. If your child is too ill to make it through the school day, then, of course, that child should stay home in bed for the day. Parents must call Jefferson in the morning to report that their child is home ill for the day. If you forget to call, you may send a note to school with your child the day your child returns to school. Students who are not excused from school by their parents will be considered truant and will be expected to make up the time they missed in classes in an after-school detention study hall.

In addition to holding truants responsible for making up lost class time, students with good attendance will be rewarded monthly with 'Good News Certificates',

which may be turned in for chances in a weekly drawing in which students will win prizes such as school supplies, books, coupons, free ice cream, and tickets to Jefferson's Hollywood Movie Party to be held each month. There will also be a competition among homerooms for best monthly attendance. As a staff, Jefferson teachers have also discussed and put into effect a number of techniques to use in the classroom to improve student attendance.

Again, however, we as a staff cannot improve your child's attendance alone. We must work cooperatively to get all Jefferson students to school each day to insure that each one is getting the best education possible. It has been said that a mind is a terrible thing to waste. Let's not waste our children's minds by allowing them to sit home watching TV or walking the streets or lying at home sleeping during the school day. Let's get them to school, where their minds can grow and develop as they should.

—Dan L. Miller,
Principal

Boy walks in to the classroom:

Teacher: Why are you late?

Boy: I saw a sign on the way to school.

Teacher: What did the sign say?

Boy: School ahead—slow down.

—Nishan Panwar

PREDICTORS OF FUTURE TRUANCY

School Related

- attendance patterns-frequent absences and tardies, suspicious excuses
- poor classroom performance in general
- frequent change of schools
- two or more years behind in reading and/or math
- failure of one or more school years
- behavior problems requiring disciplinary measures
- non-acceptance of school curriculum

Family Related

- sibling performance in school was negative
- family problems (alcoholism, abuse, neglect)
- recent death or divorce in family
- parents, do not value the school experience
- little encouragement or support from home

Peer Related

- peer relationship-loner, fighter, or shy
- friends not school oriented and/or much older
- feeling of not belonging
- negative peer pressure

Other

- language/cultural differences
- health-related problems (pregnancy, emotional, physical)
- transportation problems
- lack of basic needs
- problem with authority figures
- poor self-image

—Sally Hauck

BEING THERE MAKES IT HAPPEN

Regular attendance is a habit which should start from the first day your child is enrolled in school. Chronic low attendance affects an individual's academic development as well as his/her emotional and social development.

There are reasons why it is important to have a good attendance record at school. For example:

- developing habits of regularity in a task which will follow through and be helpful in life
- participation in and becoming a part of daily school life
- taking advantage of all the things that happen only in the classroom: demonstrations, discussions, films, peer interaction, teacher's personal help
- difficulty in finding time to complete makeup work

Age 8 or 9 appears to mark a point at which many students begin to have poor attendance. School absenteeism often leads to higher delinquency, a higher dropout rate, and unproductive adults with few or no marketable skills.

One out of four students entering high school will drop out before completing graduation requirements.

There is a role you, the parent, can play in making sure that your child does not become part of the problem.

Convey a positive attitude about school. If you show enthusiasm for what the school experience can mean, your child is more likely to look forward to it.

Notice and comment on your child's positive qualities. If necessary, offer incentives (more time to watch a favorite TV program, a later bedtime for one night, etc.) to improve attendance. Be consistent and follow through.

Find out how you can become involved in the school's volunteer program.

Answer Questions

Prepare your child for the school experience by explaining what to expect and by answering all questions honestly. He may be anxious and needs to know all the details of his situation in order to handle the stress involved. If both parents work it is especially important that the child knows the arrangements for before and after school care.

Don't Argue

Treat going to school as part of the normal course of events, something that is expected of your child and accepted by you. Let him know that school is the most important thing in his life at this time and that being there takes precedence over long weekends, babysitting, vacations, visits from relatives, shopping, etc. If your child appears nervous about going to school, discuss his/her concern, but don't argue the issue of school attendance. It is required by law!

—Sally Hauck

Other than poor attendance and emotional outbursts, children identified with school phobia are usually good students, well-mannered, and respectful at school. But these children often display a number of specific behaviors, usually before leaving for school or even the night before. They may regularly complain of headaches, stomachaches, and sore throats that diminish if they are allowed to stay home, only to reappear the next morning. Crying, tantrums, hiding, and refusal to leave are also common.

The following behaviors, identified with school phobias by the *American Psychological Association* and *Health Education Consultants* may be symptoms of school phobia:

- Worry about harm befalling a parent or pet;
- Reluctance or refusal to go to school;
- Reluctance or refusal to sleep or to sleep away from home;
- Physical health complaints on school days;
- Excessive display of distress upon separation from parent(s);
- Nightmares involving separation;
- Withdrawal, apathy, sadness, or poor concentration when separated
- Avoidance of being home alone;
- Trembling, sweating, and fidgeting on school mornings;
- Changes in activity levels, causing the child to appear sluggish, withdrawn, or hyperactive;

- Preoccupation with fear;
- Loss of appetite;
- Excessive eating;
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or intense nightmares;
- Obsession with morbid thoughts;
- Spending excessive time with the school nurse or counselor;
- Avoidance of certain places, people, or situations;
- Fear of being humiliated or embarrassed;
- Excessive self-doubt about meeting the expectations of others;
- Overwhelming anxiety when speaking in public or responding to teacher questions;
- At the adolescent level, fear of letting others watch them eat, undress for gym, or use restroom facilities.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

It's not unusual for children to develop fears or anxiety about people or events. Usually, these childhood fears diminish as the child matures and do not cause problems in everyday life. But if phobias about school continue over time, they can create a complex and serious interruption in a child's development.

School phobia is defined as anxiety and fear related to going to school. This can lead to prolonged absences from school, developmental deficiencies in academic performance, and impaired social adjustment. Parents, educators/medical personnel and mental health professionals need to be alerted, educated, and prepared to assess and provide successful intervention and support for children experiencing school phobia.

According to the *American Psychiatric Association*, school phobia affects from 5 to 10 percent of the U.S. school population in its mildest form and 1 percent in its most severe form. The onset of school phobia usually occurs at two critical stages: when children begin formal schooling at age five or six, and when students make the transition from elementary to middle or junior high school at age 11 or 12. Reluctance or refusal to attend school often occurs after extended periods at home, such as holidays or summer vacations. School phobias may also follow a stressful occurrence, such as the death of a pet or relative, a change of schools, or a move to a new neighborhood.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF SCHOOL PHOBIA

Clinicians tend to link school phobias to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. The genetic link is suggested by the fact that a number of children with school phobia have one or even two parents with anxiety disorders. This genetic link can also produce separation anxiety disorder, a child's fear of being separated from parents.

Many environmental situations can also trigger school phobia, including a troubled parental marriage, serious illness in the family, substance abuse by family members, sibling disputes, child abuse, domestic violence, and gang activity.

Parents and educators are usually the first to notice the symptoms of school phobia. Teachers often play a crucial role in identifying the problem and consulting parents and psychologists about treatment. Typically, a counselor or school psychologist is called upon to interpret the child's behavior, but care should be taken in questioning the child about why he or she doesn't want to go to school. Questions such as 'What's wrong with you?' or 'What can be so scary about school?' may make the child feel frustrated, confused, and isolated.

Before intervention begins, a team of professionals should complete a comprehensive assessment of the student's mental and physical health, and educational status. A physician or school nurse can provide the student's medical history and current health status. Mental health professionals can assess the student by using a variety of methods, including interviews, self-report instruments, parent and teacher reports, and observation to the child in a classroom setting. Based on evaluation of the assessment results, the team and parents can then decide on appropriate intervention strategies.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

FAMILY INTERVENTIONS FOR SCHOOL PHOBIA

Parents and families of children identified with school phobia are typically conscientious and loving, and because the onset of school phobia is usually sudden it often catches them off guard. By the time a diagnosis has been formulated, the behavior already may be cemented in the child.

The bottom line for the family is to get the child to school and to understand that staying home is not an option. Consistency and firmness are essential components for the success of family intervention. A child with school phobia may test parental determination in regard to school attendance, so it may be necessary for intervention to be the responsibility of the parent better suited to imposing a stringent structure in an unemotional manner.

Because mornings can be difficult times for both the school-phobic child and the family, it is helpful to establish a regular morning routine. Parents should avoid asking the child how he or she feels. The assumption should be that if children are up and around, they are well enough to go to school. If they complain of various ailments, parents should ignore them or briefly respond. If in doubt, it is best for parents to err on the side of sending children to school. There, the school nurse can evaluate their complaints, reassure them that they are fine, perhaps recommend relaxation techniques, and encourage them to rejoin their class. If they deliberately delay their departure so they will be late to school, the parents should make them go anyway. And if they leave the school grounds to go home during the day, they should be returned promptly.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS FOR SCHOOL PHOBIA

School psychologists and educators may need to develop a continuum of school intervention strategies, so that if one plan proves ineffective, the next one is ready. It may be necessary to place children with school phobia into a special education program.

Where possible, intervention should be directed by a specific person, such as a counselor, special education teacher, or school nurse, who is aware of the child's school phobia. This person should monitor, evaluate, and positively reinforce the child's attendance.

Teachers can help ease the child's phobia in the morning, which is usually the most stressful period, by greeting the child as he or she gets off the bus or out of the car, walking the child into class, later enlisting the child for special duties, and complimenting positive behavior.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

CHILD-DIRECTED INTERVENTIONS FOR SCHOOL PHOBIA

Including children in the decision-making and intervention procedures may help them feel more capable, respected, and responsible for the success of the plan. The child with school phobia may even be able to prescribe practical alterations to the plan, such as alternative schedules, different teachers/classmates, half-day attendance, or the use of a private classroom to retreat and regroup. The child can be involved in developing the menu for a reinforcement system, in which the child is rewarded when he or she successfully attends school for one hour, one day, or one week. A child might also find it comforting to bring to school a picture of parents or a pet.

—Michael Rettig and
Janice Crawford

FACTORS INFLUENCING ABSENTEEISM

There are no consistently uniform causes for absenteeism. Reasons vary from area to area, from school to school and even between similar schools in the same general geographic area.

In-school factors that are frequently causes of absenteeism:

- Inadequate program selection and class assignment methods.
- Inadequate information about the school and learner's requirements and responsibilities.
- Lack of opportunity for recognition of individuality.
- Inadequate or poor direction and supervision.
- Lack of training programs.
- Ineffective grievance procedures.
- Lack of adequate facilities, equipment, supplies and services.
- Unsatisfactory learning environment.
- Ineffective teaching.

In fact, almost any student problem can be considered a reason for absenteeism. These problems can be grouped broadly into:

1. Situations in the school relationship that affect the attitude of students towards regular attendance.
2. External situations in the community (called environmental or socioeconomic).
3. Personal problems of the individual student. Some of the most prevalent are:

In School

1. Ineffective orientation or indirection program.
2. Unsatisfactory school-student relations.
3. Lack of incentive educational programs and offerings.
4. No personal identification with school assignments.
5. Unclear school duties and responsibilities.
6. No sense of personal achievement and responsibility.
7. Personality conflicts between teachers and student.
8. Lack of motivation.
9. Fragmentation of instruction due to absences of regular teacher.
10. Poor educational preparation.
11. Inadequate rapport between counselor and student.
12. Little variety in daily and weekly scheduling of classes.
13. Inadequate Fine Arts program.
14. Task and subject repetitiveness.
15. Ineffective attendance monitoring system,
16. Unsound teacher/staff attitude towards attendance.
17. Inadequate parent orientation and education.
18. Ineffective communications between school, parent and students.
19. Inappropriate student transfer policies and procedures.

Environmental

1. Poor transportation arrangements.
2. Lack of facilities or child care, care of the aged and sick.
3. Lack of business, government, and personal services at convenient out-of-school hours—immigration, driver's licenses, traffic violations, welfare, probation, and employment service.
4. Lack of home service facilities—telephone, laundry, etc.
5. Inclement weather conditions.
6. Strong competition from community events and out-of-building educational opportunities.

Personal

1. Medical— illness of close family member.
2. Accidents — to close family members.
3. Seeking employment.
4. Household duties.
5. Recreational activities.
6. Marital problems in the home.
7. Religious ‘Holy Days.’
8. Habits—drug addition, etc.
9. Legal, social or economic problems.
10. Poor self-image or other personality conflicts.
11. Disregarding unexcused absences as serious issue.
12. Perceived equity of attainment of rewards—grades, recognition and opportunity for advancement.
13. Ethnic holidays.
14. Learning disability.

—Lewis T. Kohler

The state should be compelled to provide free public education for all our citizens, regardless of age, by using the considerable savings as a result of the deletion of compulsory attendance laws. Consequently, we could provide free education for those who, for one reason or another, do not avail themselves of educational opportunities at a young age. These persons would be able to resume their education with dignity, which is not presently the case.

—Dr. John Splaine

Wouldn't it be nice to think that we as educators could make education so attractive to the younger child that compulsory education laws would be unnecessary? I feel because secondary education is not compulsory in Arizona, we as educators are even more accountable for the quality of our education. If we see we are losing students, we know we must take a closer look at our programs and see where we are failing to provide for their needs.

—Pamela Neal

When chronic absenteeism cannot be traced to personal causes, the school is wise to look for institutional causes. For some reason or combination of reasons, the school environment does not meet a child's needs. He or she reacts by escaping. The child breaks the law to avoid school. It may be all day or part of the day. Older students, aware they may be disciplined for truancy, often arrange to be in class for roll call, then disappear, either leaving school or staying in the halls with other in-school absentees and frequently causing trouble.

Some school-caused absenteeism may be simply a result of inappropriate placement in a class that is either too difficult or too easy for the child. It may be a personality conflict with a teacher that leads a student to skip class regularly. Usually, though, the causes of chronic absenteeism are more subtle and complex. Even when students are confronted, it may be difficult for them to explain or to change their pattern of truancy. Typically, truant problems stem from a combination of home and school factors. As pressures and disincentives to attend school build on both fronts, the student becomes more inclined to skip school. When the syndrome escalates within a school or school district, as it has done in many urban settings, the system loses its ability to find students, investigate their problems, and correct them. Like a snowball rolling downhill, the problem compounds itself, and peer influence along the way makes skipping school the 'in' thing. Administrative response at this point is nearly always punitive. Containment or pushing out a student who is old enough may be the best an overworked administrator can do. Tragically, some truants are never noticed at all. Ghosts in the system, they are officially on the rolls but are seldom or never in class.

—Chrissie Bamber

If one reviews the history of student attendance in public schools, today's children are performing admirably. More students are attending for more days each year and are staying in school longer than ever before. There are, however, pockets of student absenteeism that are absolutely unacceptable and growing worse, particularly in large cities. When the U.S. government first started collecting statistics on enrollment in 1870, only about 55% of the youngsters between 5 and 17 attended public schools. Of those enrolled, 60% was the average attendance rate. By 1900, 70% were enrolled and attendance had climbed to 70%. In 1940 enrollment approached 90%, attendance 80%. In 1970 enrollment and attendance both topped 90%, and by 1976 enrollment and attendance had edged up slightly again. (Enrollment did dip slightly during the 1950s and 60s, but attendance as a percent of the eligible school population held steady.)

—Chrissie Bamber

Attendance of students in homerooms where the teachers were interested and concerned with their students was . . . significantly better than homerooms where the teachers were not.

—Carl Ziegler (1928)

The National Association of Secondary School Principals has identified these factors as contributing to student truancy: family attitudes, social forces, peer pressure, economic circumstances (need to work), home-school relationship, school size, student age, and health. Added to this stock list are some new causes of unexcused absence: winter vacations, erosion of parental control, economic affluence, novel life styles, and breakdown in enforcement of attendance laws. Of this long list, schools can readily change and control only three factors: the home-school relationship, school size, and the breakdown in the enforcement of attendance laws.

—Chrissie Bamber

Very small and very large school systems have better attendance rates than medium to large ones, each for different reasons. When schools are very small, absences are highly visible. When a student is absent, it is noticed. Also, a high level of friendship and loyalty can keep school-caused absences low. These effects decrease as the size of the system increases, until a high degree of formality and management efficiency takes over in very large systems, again depressing absences.

—Oliver R. Gibson

Student attendance is often reflective of school programs and the classroom learning environment. Does the way in which the teacher teaches affect student attendance? Without any research data, most adults would answer, 'Yes, this is true regardless of the age of the child.' It is probably fair to say that students who are well satisfied with a teacher's style and personality don't mind going to school. Repeated claims of stomachaches and vague illnesses by even young children who have previously made a good adjustment to school can signal a problem with an individual teacher. The teacher may be too strict, unfair, unprepared for class, bored with the class material, or distracted by personal problems. If teachers themselves are absent frequently, students may follow their lead. This has been substantiated by a study of five pilot schools conducted by the national parent-teacher association.

—Chrissie Bamber

Absenteeism has been recognized in many instances to be a symptom of poor supervision, management, and administration, leading to low morale, tardiness, inferior teaching, poor student achievement, and excessive school termination.

—Lewis Kohler

Reporter Shelly Lichen-Horn, a former teacher, posed as a high school student at Cody High School in order to witness firsthand the fractured and fearful lives of teachers in Detroit's secondary schools. Teachers were portrayed as locking their door against intruders, carrying weapons for protection, even lecturing on their fear of truant students and their planned defenses against assault.

—Chrissie Bamber

When absences are caused by a student's personal problems in school or at home, individual attention is especially important. A student of normal or above-average intelligence whose school performance and attendance rates suddenly fall may be having a problem at home. It may be related to poverty, illness, or the parents' divorce. If the child does not have warm clothing to wear to school, is kept at home to babysit, is put to work, or is caring for a sick parent or sibling while adult family members work, these situations are relatively easy to identify and the school can take some action. Referral to social service and welfare agencies may help children in eligible families. In many rural and inner-city schools, the main work of the school PTA is providing warm clothing for students so they can attend school.

—Chrissie Bamber

When truancy stems from the indifferent attitude of students or parents toward school, the problem is more difficult to pin down or solve. How do you get students to attend school if they and their parents don't think it is important? Some youth, especially minority students in urban schools, are discouraged by returning graduates who tell them their high school diploma will only help them land a job as a dishwasher. If schools are not preparing students for independence in adult life, they should undertake a serious assessment of their programs and standards. A renewed focus on career education is one way schools are responding that could have positive effects on attendance.

—Chrissie Bamber

TEN FACTORS RELATING TO STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism in secondary schools prompted a recent study to identify and analyze factors related to absenteeism in a large (3,200 students) Connecticut high school (grades 9-12).

The basic sources of information used were the individual student records as well as information obtained from a student questionnaire. Data were generated on attendance as it related to nine factors:

- age
- I.Q. scores
- grade level and sex
- program of study
- parental employment
- school activities
- number of parents
- class rank
- living at home
- student responsibility.

For the purpose of this study, absenteeism was defined as an absence from school for an entire day, and no distinction was made between absences that were considered excusable or non-excusable.

The Findings

1. Cycles of Absenteeism. Wednesdays and Thursdays have the lowest incidence of absenteeism. Absenteeism increased noticeably beginning the third week of the school year and continued to increase thereafter. When half-day sessions were scheduled (immediately prior to Thanksgiving and Christmas vacations), absenteeism rose to nearly 40 percent. Absenteeism fell off drastically during the mid-semester and final exam periods.
2. Age. As students became older their incidence of absenteeism increased.
3. Grade level and sex. Freshman, sophomore, and junior boys had consistently fewer absences than their girl counterparts. It was not until the senior year that this trend altered direction.
4. Parental employment. Students with both parents unemployed had the highest incidence of absenteeism, while those with both parents working had the lowest.
5. Number of parents at home. Students who lived with both parents had a lesser tendency to be absent than those who lived with only one parent or guardian.
6. I.Q. Scores. Generally, as I.Q. scores increased, the rate of absenteeism decreased. The one deviation in this pattern was with students in the 80-89 I.Q. range.
7. Program of study. Students in certain general 'tracks' had differing absenteeism rates. In this study, college preparatory students had the lowest absentee rate and general students had the highest.
8. School activities. It would appear that students who participated in extracurricular activities were absent less than those who did not.
9. Class rank. Rank-in-class (seniors only) tended to correspond with the rate of absenteeism. Students at the top academically missed the fewest days.
10. Student personality. Two personality factors - personal responsibility and consideration of others-were examined because they appeared to indicate personality patterns that might be related to absenteeism. The ratings were provided by four or more of each student's teachers. As the rating categories increased in value (1 was low, 5 was high) group absenteeism levels decreased.

—Richard A. Dempsey
and Joseph F.
Levanto

One of the most frustrating problems in today's classrooms is tardiness. Some teachers report that the first four to eight minutes of class is almost a waste of time as students straggle in, disrupting instruction. Tardiness has other negative repercussions in addition to robbing teachers and students of precious instructional time and momentum. When students are unsupervised in hallways and restrooms after the tardy bell rings—whether at the beginning of school or during passing periods—there is ample opportunity for fighting, bullying and other misconduct. This misbehavior can carry over into the classroom, thus wasting even more instructional time. Teachers' individual responses to tardy students range from ignoring them to sending them to the office. This inconsistency can confuse students about the importance of being on time to class. Put simply, as Peter Davis, principal of Hill Classical Middle School in Long Beach, California, says, 'tardiness suggests school is not important.'

—Randy Sprick and
K. Daniels

REASONS FOR STUDENT TARDINESS

Students are social animals, if they are late to class, they can have an extra 5-15 minutes to chat with friends.

There are no positive incentives to be on time. In some classes, no constructive activity happens for the first five minutes, giving students the impression that they won't be missing anything if they are late.

There are no immediate consequences for being tardy. In many schools, staff members report tardies intermittently and nothing may happen until the tenth incident.

There is a lack of supervision in hallways. If only a few staff members are systematically supervising the halls, restrooms, and stairwells, students may realize they aren't likely to be caught when they are tardy.

Obstructed hallway flow can cause students to be late for classes. Students may congregate in ways that block traffic for others, particularly for the younger or smaller students.

- Work together in a coordinated, highly choreographed team effort...If every one does a little, then no one must do a lot.
- Determine and communicate consequences and apply them consistently.
- Provide positive supervision in halls, restrooms, and other common areas by treating students respectfully.

- View misbehavior as an instructional opportunity. With a friendly demeanor, talk with the student about why it is important to be on time and encourage the student to try harder in the future. For example, share that ‘it’s important to be on time because you don’t want to miss what the teacher is saying,’ rather than ‘you don’t want to be late.’
- Develop and present lessons to students that explicitly teach them how to behave in the hallways, restrooms, and throughout the common areas in the school.

—Randy Spirck and
K. Daniels

Maria Mercado was angry. The Chicago truant officer had stopped by an apartment to check up on a student who had missed 26 days of school. What she found was a little girl whose hair was so full of lice her scalp was covered with scabs. The child was filthy, too, unwashed and wearing old clothes that hadn’t been cleaned in some time. Child neglect was nothing new to Mercado. She saw it all the time on the job. But this afternoon, something snapped inside. Incensed, she chewed, out the girl’s mother. Why wasn’t the girl attending school? Why didn’t she have decent clothes to wear? Why wasn’t something being done about the lice? The mother became defensive, then indignant. She complained about not having enough money. And, as far as she was concerned, attendance was ‘the school’s responsibility.’ ‘Let me tell you something, girlfriend,’ responded Mercado, eyeing the mother’s clean clothes and expensive jewelry. ‘This little girl didn’t ask you to bring her into this world. She’s your responsibility. I want you to clean her hair, bathe her, and clean her clothes. And I want to see her in school on Monday.’

—Del Stover

A telephone call to the student’s home can often solve a truancy problem in minutes. But when appropriate answers aren’t forthcoming, the truant officer’s only recourse is a visit to the child’s home. Home visits get results: Even when parents or students don’t want to talk to someone from the schools, it’s hard for them to ignore a truant officer pounding at the door.

The visits are also informative. One glimpse of a child’s home can tell a truant officer a great deal: Is a large family crowded into a small, two-room flat? Is there work space for children to do homework? Are older children supervising younger siblings? Are the rooms neat or neglected and dirty?

‘You don’t see what’s happening on the phone,’ truant officer Schooler says. ‘When you do home visits, however, you don’t need a lot of words when the mother is drunk on the floor ... or the child doesn’t have any clothes adequate for school.’

—Del Stover

Year in and year out, school principals across the United States name student absenteeism as their most perplexing problem.

Why truancy and not money or some other more ballyhooed problem? Because the building principal is in a position to see first-hand the awful impact that chronic absenteeism has on children and schools— and the many other problems that it creates.

Truancy has a dramatic impact on school finance, crime, dropout rates, teacher morale, vandalism, test scores, and probably a lot of other important areas.

It is essential, therefore, that school board members take a close look at this problem and support their principals and other administrators in seeking effective solutions.

—Douglas Hoefft

The saddest part of the attendance problem is that so many people want to help the truant. Schools have developed quality programs that individually meet students' needs. Work study, vocational education, teacher aide, and community volunteer programs were created to make school more interesting to the potential truant. Specially trained counselors and social workers assist in working out the truant student's problems. The juvenile court's whole philosophy is based on giving additional services to the child brought into its system. Teachers devote hours studying ways of making their curriculum more interesting. School districts spend thousands of dollars to make their physical plants as pleasant as possible.

Unfortunately, all of these fine efforts are rendered useless unless the truant wants to be helped or unless legal authority is brought to bear.

—Douglas Hoefft

Almost anything that school officials do to demonstrate their concern over the truancy problem will produce some positive results. The worst thing is to do nothing....Recent research indicates that the following have proved to be helpful in preventing chronic truancy: (1) home visits; (2) letter to parents at the fifth absence; (3) phone calls to the home immediately upon discovering that a student is absent; (4) parent-school conferences; (5) changes in a student's class schedule (6) attendance contracts where the student promises to attend school regularly and the parent agrees to ensure compliance; (7) a student buddy system; (8) periodic reminders to chronic truants that someone is interested—and watching.

Schools offering a wide variety of instructional programs also find it easier to solve truancy problems. Placing certain students in vocational or work-study programs often stops chronic truancy before it starts.

—Douglas Hoefft

Sitting across the desk, school officials face the truant, a kid convinced that whatever is outside is better than school. Because this student disrupts only his own education and is seldom in school, it is difficult to know how to help him. He is not school-oriented and lacks motivation from home. He probably gets up in the afternoon (being a night person), spends his evenings out on the streets, and then sits in front of the TV until it goes off the air.

Some truants want to work and earn money. Having a social life demands mobility and money for concerts, cars, and clothes. Most truants, however, don't know what they want, and drugs and alcohol often complicate their problems. Their parents have lost control, and the students often dictate their own terms to the parents. They often, in fact, believe there will be no consequences for their behavior.

—John Connelly, Jeffrey
Morse and Adam
Paikai

It may sound like throwing water on a drowning victim, but one-fourth of all student suspensions are for truancy or tardiness, according to a nationwide study by the National School Boards Association.

At the same time, opponents of suspension as a disciplinary measure contend that: (1) students who get suspended usually are those with academic problems who can least afford losing the classroom time; (2) suspended students often have no supervision and get into trouble outside the school; (3) staff members who might help the student (counselors, psychologists, coaches, teachers) lose contact with the student during the suspension; (4) suspension does not get the parents involved solving the student's problems unless school officials provide vigorous follow-up; and (5) suspension is usually a way of ignoring a problem rather than dealing with it.

—Les Brown, Robert
Goodall and G.
Thomas Baer

DROPOUT PREDICTION TABLE CRITERIA

- _____ 1. Two years behind in reading and/or arithmetic.
- _____ 2. Majority of grades are below average.
- _____ 3. Failure of one or more school years. Grade or grades failed _____
- _____ 4. Performance consistently below potential.
- _____ 5. Irregular attendance and frequent tardiness. Number of days _____
reported absent or late due to sickness _____
- _____ 6. No participation in extracurricular activities.
- _____ 7. Frequent change of schools.
- _____ 8. Behavior problems requiring disciplinary measures.
- _____ 9. Feeling of 'not belonging' because of: size _____, speech _____,
personality _____, development _____, nationality _____,
social class _____, family disgrace _____, special education in
school _____, dress _____, lack of friends among classmates or
staff _____, other _____.
- _____ 10. More children than parents can readily control. Only child for
divorced and working mother _____, five or more children for
non-divorced working mother _____.
- _____ 11. Unhappy family situation.
- _____ 12. Parents inconsistent in affection and discipline.
- _____ 13. Father figure weak or absent.
- _____ 14. Education of parents at eighth grade level or below.
- _____ 15. Few family friends; among these few are many-problem units.
- _____ 16. Friends not school oriented.
- _____ 17. Friends much older or younger.
- _____ 18. Resentful of all authority (homes, school, police, job, church)
- _____ 19. Deferred gratification pattern weak
- _____ 20. Weak self-image

===== TOTAL

—Lucias F. Cervantes

When it comes to punctuality, children are not very different from the adults in their world. And, they certainly learn to parrot the excuses they hear from parents. During two years working in the middle school office of a private girls school, I conducted an informal study of tardiness and how students explained their lateness. The girls were required to sign in if they arrived after homeroom began (at 8:05 a.m.). I compiled and compared their explanations for being late over a two-year period. The reasons can be broken down into the following:

Transportation

- Traffic
- Carpool/Car Trouble
- Weather
- Bus

Health

Sleeping Habits

Family-Related Excuses

No Reason

Miscellaneous: Leg, Exam, Bathroom, Scotland, Nutcracker, Door did not open, It's a long story, Picked dad up late, Couldn't find shoes, couldn't find green and white socks, Bad communications, Sister got locked in closet.

—Barbara Nelson

The assignment is on the board: an opinion question. Students entering the classroom know the procedure. Recognizing that during the first few moments of class there will be a debate on this issue, they open their books and begin to look for evidence to support their points of view. The class routine and expectations have been clearly defined and students know that the person who presents a clear, logically sequenced argument will win the debate. When the bell rings the discussion begins. Actively involved, students are excited about what they are learning.

A few minutes into the debate the door opens. Everyone looks up. Why are these two guys late? The debate loses momentum as the teacher shifts her focus from the debate towards these late students. One of the students has a 'pass' and quickly takes his seat. However, following school procedures, the teacher sends the other one to the office to obtain a tardy pass. Refocusing on the debate the teacher pulls the students back on task for a few minutes until, you guessed it, the same late student re-enters the classroom and interrupts instruction and learning a second time.

By now this student has missed about ten minutes of instruction; learning for the other students has been interrupted twice, the pace halted, thoughts scattered. Is this unusual? We think not. In casual conversations with teachers they repeatedly tell me that most students fail classes because they ‘are not there, come late, or fail to turn in class assignments.’ Research supports their experiences.

—Judith A. Kerrins &
Denver Hayes

One ironic consequence of being late for class is even more time out of class to go secure a ‘late pass,’ or, in some cases, being suspended for not following the rules and showing up on time.

—Judith A. Kerrins &
Denver Hayes

Having everyone in class on time does not necessarily mean that instruction will be improved or that learning will increase. However, having everyone there on time does decrease the probability of interruptions and increase the allocated time and, thereby, the chance of increased achievement. Thus, decreasing student tardiness seems an important, worthwhile school goal.

If tardiness is an issue in your school, based on our experiences we recommend that school personnel undertake a thoughtful review of their tardiness policy and the effectiveness of that policy. Teacher involvement in identifying the extent of the problem and possible solutions is imperative, along with both students’ and parents’ voices. Students must be part of the solution and their recommendations merit consideration.

Because of the disruption and time off task which occurs for all students during whole class direct instruction—or for any group a tardy student may be a part of—when a student enters the classroom late, the major emphasis should be placed on preventing tardy behavior. In this way teachers move from being reactive to being proactive. To do this effectively, students and parents should be involved in and informed of school policies and procedures. Further, those policies should be carefully monitored, consistently enforced, and regularly evaluated for effectiveness.

It is clear that no single consequence will decrease or eliminate tardiness altogether. There is no one easy answer or solution to student tardiness. Still, a careful review of student tardiness data, a process which allows different people to voice their concerns and recommendations regarding the tardiness issue, and a thoughtfully designed plan to address unique building needs will contribute to the likelihood that more students attend classes on time. Being there on time is important; it is the first step toward learning.

—Judith A. Kerrins &
Denver Hayes

The best cure for an ailing schoolboy has always been a holiday.
--Unknown

Yesterday is a canceled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note.
Today is the only cash you have—spend it wisely.
--Unknown

Caring teachers, personal counseling, innovative instructional materials, and effective teaching techniques have little impact on students who are not in school to benefit from them.
--Dan L. Miller

In many high schools across the country, one in four students is now absent on any given day.
--C. Bruck

Truancy is one of the most destructive forces in education today.
--Douglas Hoelt

The absent feel and fear every ill.
--Miguel de Cervantes

Absence is the greatest of evils.
--Jean de La Fontaine

Som men ben so long absent from there play,
That others come and take there game ewey.
--Unknown

So near and yet so far.
--Martial

The absent get farther off every day.
--S. G. Champion

Absence is a remedy for hate as well as an armor against love.
--Jean de La Fontaine

Out of sight, out of mind.
--Homer

Long absent, soon forgotten.

—English Proverb

The absent are like children, helpless to defend themselves.

--Charles Reade

Absence, in its anxious longing and sense of vacancy, is as a foretaste of death.

--Anna Jameson

Absence makes the heart go wander.

Absent today, lost tomorrow.

--Eleanor Doan

Absence diminishes moderate passions and increases great ones, as the wind extinguishes tapers and adds fury to fire.

--Francois, Duc de la
Rochefoucauld

Far from eye, far from heart.

--Proverbs of Hendyng

The absent are always in the wrong.

--English Proverb

Seldom seen, soon forgotten.

--Richard Hilles

The absent one will not be the heir.

--Irish Proverb

The absent are further away every day.

--Japanese Proverb

The absent and the dead have no friends.

--Spanish Proverb

Truant's prayer: Give us this day our day in bed.

--Unknown

No one speaks of us in our presence as he does in our absence.

--Blaise Pascal

He who is late may gnaw the bones.

--Yugoslav Proverb

To keep someone waiting or to be kept waiting is a cause of Angst which is out of all proportion to the minor fault of unpunctuality. Therefore we may assume that we keep people waiting symbolically because we do not wish to see them and that our anxiety is due not to being late, but to our having to see them at all.

--Cyril Connolly

A positive correlation exists between performance and attendance in high school and success in the workplace, and those individuals who realize this early in life will have a greater chance of success in their chosen careers.

--Corinne E. Brophy

School attendance is basic to success in school and groundwork for future success on the job. Daily attendance displays diligence and perseverance in an effort to succeed.

--Don Zimmermann

Good school attendance means consistent and intense exposure to studies, which facilitates learning. Secondly, good attendance leads to success both in school and at work, because teachers and employers view punctuality and low absenteeism as an indicator of ambition and responsibility, and respond favorably to such behavior.

--Jane E. Neff

Truant high school students are doing themselves a great disservice. They are cheating themselves out of a fundamental education that serves as a building block for a future in a society that is providing a smaller and smaller niche for the less-educated. Perhaps most important of all is that they are failing to develop a sense of responsibility.

--J. P. Sanders

A young person who has a record started for poor attendance is like an athlete who believes he doesn't have to train. Class attendance is part of the training, as well as good study habits. If you want to win the race, the diploma, and the job, stay in condition. Start with good attendance.

--R. S. Tate

Bad habits acquired at an early age tend to stay with us as we mature. The student who shows a lack of responsibility by cutting classes may tend to avoid job or family responsibility later in life. The best predictor of future performance is past performance since typically people do not naturally change their behavior as they mature.

--Christopher P. Dona

Attendance in school is the start of a good habit or a bad habit, and this habit continues in life and in work. One can only perform adequately if one is present; it doesn't matter how proficient one is if one is absent.

--Harold J. Polzer

Good attendance is an indication of being a responsible person and that is an essential quality for growth.

--Douglas W. Pelino

Punctuality is the politeness of kings.

--Unknown

I have always been a quarter of an hour before my time, and it has made a man of me.

—Lord Nelson

The absent party is always to blame.

--Unknown

Never were the absent in the right.

--Unknown

If a person is away, his right is away.

--Moorish Proverb

He is guilty who is not at home.

--Ukrainian Proverb

Out of sight, out of mind.

--Unknown

Absence is the mother of disillusion.

--Unknown

The whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school.

--William Shakespeare

The trouble with being punctual is that nobody's there to appreciate it.

--Franklin P. Jones

I would rather be in company with a dead man, than with an absent one; for if the dead man gives me no pleasure, at least he shows me no contempt; whereas, the absent man, silently indeed, but very plainly, tells me that he does not think me worth his attention.

--Lord Chesterfield

Punctuality is the duty of gentlemen and the necessity of men of business.

--Samuel Smiles

Nothing is more annoying than a tardy friend.

--Plautus

Late starters are seldom winners.

--Unknown

A certain teacher said to his student, 'Congratulations! This is the earliest you've been late in a long time.'

--Unknown

There's a difference between working every day and having a perfect attendance record.

--Unknown

Method is the very hinge of business; and there is no method without punctuality.

—Richard Cecil

'Better late than never,' is not half so good a maxim as 'Better never late.'

--Unknown

A little too late is much too late.

--German Proverb

The absent are like children, helpless to defend themselves.

--Charles Reade

The absent are always in the wrong.

--English Proverb

Lost time is never found again.

--Thelonious Monk

There are few things in life as delightful as hooky. To get up in the morning early, with the horrid burden of school hanging over your head, and setting out for it, knowing you're going to get five hours of mindless, agonizing, sort of soul-deadening nothing. Then deciding suddenly with a friend that you're not going to go....I mean, it's like a reprieve from the electric chair.

--Woody Allen

Truancy is a failure to thrive.

--Milton S. Wharton

Jefferson thought schools would produce free men: we prove him right by putting dropouts in jail.

--Benjamin R. Barber

Presence is more than just being there.

--Malcolm Forbes

Failure is not the only punishment for laziness; there is also the success of others.

--Jules Renard

No matter how big or soft or warm your bed is, you still have to get out of it.

--Grace Slick

The opportunity that God sends does not wake up him who is asleep.

--Senegalese Proverb

Those who are absent are always wrong.

--Congolesse Folk Saying

Punctuality is the virtue of the bored.

--Evelyn Waugh

You must be present to win.

--*Las Vegas Casino Sign*

Women have a less accurate measure of time than men: there is a clock in Adam, none in Eve.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Punctuality is a virtue, if you don't mind being lonely.

--Unknown

If you don't come to class, you don't get to pass.

--Old Teacher Saying

The absent are easily refuted.

—C. S. Lewis

The surest way to be late is to have plenty of time.

—Leo Kennedy

Good habits once established, are just as hard to break as bad habits.

—Robert Puller

The secret of getting ahead is getting started.

—Agatha Christie

How did it get so late so soon?

—Dr. Seuss

If your absence won't make any difference, your presence won't either.

—Unknown

If you can't be on time, be early.

—Timothy Snipes

The day will happen whether or not you get up.

—John Ciardi

Presence is more than just being there.

—Malcolm Forbes

No matter how you feel. No matter how you think the professor feels about you. It's important to have a consistent presence in the classroom. If nothing else, the professor will know you care enough and are serious enough to be there.

--Nikki Giovanni

To Whom It May concern:

Cara is tardy this morning as a result of a condition known as teenage-ism. Adolescents across our great nation are afflicted, and there is no known cure. Symptoms are multitudinous, but this particular morning she suffered from an inability to remove herself from her bed, and also felt the need to talk back to her birth-giver. She seems to be recovering her senses after watching her cell phone fly out the cat window. Please call me if there is another flare-up.

Thank you.

Nicole Poppic

'Why aren't you in school? I see you every day wandering around.'

'Oh, they don't miss me,' she said. 'I'm antisocial, they say. I don't mix. It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it? Social to me means talking to you about things like this.' She rattled some chestnuts that had fallen off the tree in the front yard. 'Or talking about how strange the world is. Being with people is nice. But I don't think it's social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you? An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That's not social to me at all. It's a lot of funnels and lot of water poured down the spout and out the bottom, and them telling us it's wine when it's not. They run us so ragged by the end of the day we can't do anything but go to bed or head for a Fun Park to bully people around, break windowpanes in the Window Smasher place or wreck cars in the Car Wrecker place with the big steel ball. Or go out in the cars and race on the streets, trying to see how close you can get to lampposts, playing 'chicken' and 'knock hubcaps.' I guess I'm everything they say I am, all right. I haven't any friends. That's supposed to prove I'm abnormal. But everyone I know is either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another. Do you notice how people hurt each other nowadays?'

— Ray Bradbury

Another reason many people do not hear opportunity knocking is that it usually knocks early in the morning and they sleep late.

--*Cincinnati Inquirer*

Up, sluggard, and waste not life; in the grave will be sleeping enough.

--Benjamin Franklin

A sleepy man catches no fish.

--Maltese Proverb

Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry, all things easy. He that rises late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night, while laziness travels so slowly that poverty soon overtakes him.

--Benjamin Franklin

He that sleeps much, learns little.

—Spanish Proverb

It may be too late already, but it's not as much too late now as it will be later.

--C. H. Weisert

Principal: This is the third time you've been late to school this week. Do you know what that means?

Student: It's Wednesday?

—Unknown

Success doesn't know these things about cold or early or tired. It just knows if you showed up or not.

—Unknown

The potential dropout is the one most threatened/frightened by student activities. Many of the normal programs simply do not appeal to the potential dropout, who is characteristically either not interested in the establishment, or who is in conflict with it and would rather leave activities alone.

Here is an opportunity for peer counselors, for student council leaders to reach out or provide both programs and opportunities for dropouts to get involved. One of the great problems of some activities is the fact that a grade point average is a prerequisite to belonging. Use of existing student groups, faculty attention to at-risk students, and availability of programs that appeal directly to the potential dropout are enormously successful. Car clubs, job opportunities, and television and computer use are areas that appeal to the potential dropout and could perhaps be the lifeline that keeps a young person in school.

— Earl Reum

No dream comes true until you wake up and go to work.

—Unknown

Joe had a history of poor school attendance. His measured intelligence ranged from 103 to 85. He suffered from migraine headaches and got into minor disciplinary scrapes. A notation on his school records simply said ‘difficult home situation.’ Joe failed 7th grade but was placed in 8th grade; subsequently, he failed 8th grade and was placed in 9th grade. He failed 9th grade the following year. Now a 17-year-old freshman, he did not return to school. In the years that followed, he began to drink heavily and was unable to hold a job. After his girlfriend ended their relationship, Joe was convicted on the last of several DWIs (driving while intoxicated). He ended his life.

—Maxine Seibel and
Joseph N. Muray

ATTENDANCE SLOGANS

80 Percent of Success is Showing Up.

Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow.

Be Here! Every Day. All Day. All The Way!

Be Here. Get There.

Being Here Is Half The Battle.

Everyday In School Matters.

Get An Education. Stay In School!

Grades Go Down When You're Not Around.

I Need To Aim To Attend School 100% Of The Time.

It's Cool To Be In School Everyday.

It's Not In To Be Out.

Missing School = Missing Out!

NBA All Stars. Never Been Absent.

On Time and On Target!

School Attendance Matters.

School Isn't Boring If You're There.

School Keeps You Safe, Educates You, And Prepares You For Your Future. Don't
Miss Out!

Show Up. Grow Up!

Show Your Class. Stay In School.

Skipping Class Is Skipping Life.

Stay Cool And Be At School.

Stay In School, Keep Your Freedom.

Stay In School. Don't Be Late. Graduate.

Staying On Target Is The Best Way!

Thanks For 'Beeing' Here.

There's No Time Like The Present and No Substitute For Being Present.
Timing Is Everything. Get To School On Time!

—Brandon Gaille

BENEFITS OF DAILY ATTENDANCE

By attending class regularly, your child is more likely to keep up with the daily lessons and assignments, and take quizzes and tests on time.

There are other benefits as well:

Achievement: San Diego Unified School District found that students who attended school regularly were more likely to pass reading and math assessments than students who didn't attend school regularly.

Opportunity: For older students, being in school every day gives them a chance to learn more about college and scholarship opportunities, and to take the important exams they need to build a successful academic record.

Exposure to the English language: Regular school attendance can also help students who are learning English by giving them the chance to master the skills and information they need more quickly and accurately—even in other subjects!

Being part of the school community: Just by being present at school, your child is learning how to be a good citizen by participating in the school community, learning valuable social skills, and developing a broader world view.

The importance of education: Your commitment to school attendance will also send a message to your child that education is a priority for your family, going to school every day is a critical part of educational success, and that it's important to take your responsibilities seriously—including going to school.

—*colorincolorado.org* /

Encouraging regular school attendance is one of the most powerful ways you can prepare your child for success—both in school and in life. When you make school attendance a priority, you help your child get better grades, develop healthy life habits, avoid dangerous behavior and have a better chance of graduating from high school.

When students are absent for fewer days, their grades and reading skills often

improve—even among those students who are struggling in school. Students who attend school regularly also feel more connected to their community, develop important social skills and friendships, and are significantly more likely to graduate from high school, setting them up for a strong future.

But when kids are absent for an average of just two days of school per month—even when the absences are excused—it can have a negative impact. These absences can affect kids as early as Kindergarten.

For example, young elementary school students who miss an average of just two school days per month often have difficulty keeping up with their peers academically and tend to fall behind in reading. But when students are able to read on grade level by the end of third grade, which is when kids transition from learning to read to reading to learn, they are three to four times more likely to graduate high school and attend college, post-graduate, or professional development classes than their peers who struggle with reading.

As a parent, you can prepare your child for a lifetime of success by making regular school attendance a priority. By figuring out the reasons for your child’s absences—whether they’re physical or emotional—and taking advantage of support services—such as free tutoring, student mentoring and afterschool activities—you can help set your child on the path to success.

—*absencesaddup.org*

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

As a parent or guardian, it is possible to plan ahead in order to limit your child’s absences, make school attendance a priority, and help your child from falling behind if it is necessary to miss a day of school. You can do this in the following ways:

Help your child get to school on time every day. Babysitting, problems with a car or late bus, and the weather are not permissible reasons to miss school. Frequently coming to school late may also be noted on your child’s permanent record, and will make it difficult for your child to stay caught up with the first lessons of each morning. Teach your child how to set and use an alarm clock, and keep the television turned off in the morning.

Follow the school’s guidelines and attendance policy, and report excused absences immediately. At the beginning of the school year, review the school’s rules and make sure you understand whom you need to call if your child is going to be absent.

Check homework. Check each night to see that your child understands and completes the day’s homework assignments.

Take an active role. Stay involved with your child's daily experiences at school by asking how the school day went, and then listening carefully to what your child shares with you—both the successes and struggles. Make it a point to meet your child's teacher and friends.

Locate potential sources of anxiety. If your child frequently appears upset or reluctant to go to school and cannot tell you why, schedule an appointment with his or her teacher or school counselor to talk about possible sources of the anxiety.

Keep updated on school events and announcements. Read the school documents that your child brings home and take note of important announcements and dates, such as back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences.

Try to limit the amount of time that your child misses school due to medical appointments or illness. If possible, avoid scheduling doctor's appointments during the school day. Allow your child to stay home only in the case of contagious or severe illnesses.

Schedule family events with your child's school schedule in mind. Plan holiday celebrations or family trips during weekends or school vacations. In the case of family emergencies or unexpected trips, talk to your child's teacher as far in advance as possible and set up a way that your child can work ahead or bring important homework on the trip.

Plan ahead. Encourage your child to prepare for the next school day by laying out clothes the night before and helping to fix lunches.

Promote good health. Make sure that your child eats a balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, and has opportunities to exercise every day through a sports team or playtime outside.

Create a restful environment. Finally, make sure that your child can relax before bedtime by doing something quiet like reading rather than do something stimulating, like watching television. Ensure that your child gets enough quality sleep—ideal amounts range from 8 to 12 hours. Getting enough sleep will help her get up on time, be refreshed in the morning, and feel ready for a full day of learning ahead!

—*colorincolorado.org*

ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS

Students often respond to concrete rewards and peer pressure better than they do to lectures from parents and teachers. For little or no cost, schools and communities can create incentives for good attendance.

- Offer incentives: Tap local businesses for gift certificates or prizes that can be given to the students, classes or schools with the best attendance records. Think of incentives for parents whose children experience improved attendance. Come up with low-cost options the school can provide, such as certificates or dance parties in the gym. Focus on smaller increments—perfect attendance for a week or a month—rather than an entire year.
- Make it a contest: Competitions for the classroom or grade with the best attendance can help encourage students to come to school every day. They don't want to let their classmates down.
- Sponsor a poster contest: Students can develop posters emphasizing the importance of good attendance. Sponsor a contest and invite businesses to donate modest prizes.
- Tap Star Power: For older students, *Get Schooled*, a nonprofit that uses rock stars and celebrities to help reduce dropout rates, offers twice yearly Attendance Challenges, in which secondary schools compete to see which school can post the biggest increases in attendance. The winners receive visits from celebrities and in-school concerts. Celebrities also offer taped wake-up calls for students involved in the competitions. *Attendance Works* is teaming with *Get Schooled* to explore broader campaigns for the whole community.

—*educationcoordinatingcouncil.org*

Absences add up! Missing just 2 days a month means a child misses 10% of the school year.

--*Attendance Counts*

Because you hold a particular position, doesn't mean that you are more important than anyone else. Your time is not more valuable than anybody else's time. If you are late you show that you have no respect for another person's time and therefore no respect for other people because you consider yourself to be more important.

—Nelson Mandela

Tardiness is disrespectful, selfish and unprofessional.

--Fatima Nacana

The want of punctuality is a want of honest principle; for however people may think themselves authorized to rob God and themselves of their own time, they can plead no right to lay a violent hand on the time and duties of their neighbor.

—Charlotte Elizabeth
Tonna

I figured this was the easy stuff, and if we couldn't show up on time, looking right and acting right, we weren't going to be able to do anything else.

--Bo Schembechler

Beginning of a great day begins a night before.

--Sukant Ratnakar

Punctuality is not just limited to arriving at a place at the right time, it is also about taking actions at the right time.

--Amit Kalantri

If you have been told that you are late and unreliable more than once, then not only do you lack punctuality, but you also lack decency and seriousness.

--Auliq Ice

Maybe it's because he never had any control over what was happening to him as a boy. Being late was somehow a way of taking charge.

--Jan Karon



[As a high school dean of students, I've worked with thousands of students over the years and have addressed all types of student issues. Linda Foster (pseudonym) was a memorable student. Her life and her troubles live with me still. This is her story. It's the story of a girl whose truancy started because of home problems. The events in the story are true, and the characters in the story are real.]

THE GRAND DELUSION

by

Dan L. Miller

Linda Foster hates school. Well, at least, now she does. She had always enjoyed working with her friends on school projects and assignments that interested her. But that was in elementary school. Things started to change in junior high, and now that she was in high school, she was miserable. For one thing, her parents had gotten a divorce. She and her mother had moved in with Grandma back in Illinois, while her father stayed in California. Linda used to lie awake nights with a knotted stomach and shattered emotions as a result of the terrifying, brutal fights her mom and dad used to have. She hated her dad dur-

ing the terrible fights because of what she felt he was doing to her mother. But now, back in Illinois with only Mom and Gram, it was lonely. It would be nice to have a dad—even one that was not so perfect.

And now in school, Linda's mind wandered more than it used to. She had no friends and wasn't that interested in making any. New schools were always hard, but this one was strange. Most of the kids were cliquish, and they pretty much ignored Linda. She was a cute girl with a slim figure. She had also once possessed a beaming smile and a bouncy personality. The smile had given way to a drawn, forlorn expression, however, and the exuberance had been replaced by listlessness. She simply no longer cared about school and friends. Her future seemed uncertain, and her thoughts often centered on her family and her immediate plans for the future. Would she stay with her Grandma in Illinois? Would she and her mom return to California? Would they ever reunite with her father? Would she ever see him again? Would she ever see her friends again or know the good times she'd once had? That was all in the past, and what her future held, she didn't know.

Linda had settled into a routine of lounging in bed in the morning until after her mom had yelled at her and her Grandma had physically pulled her out of bed. She then, with a great deal of effort, pulled on her clothes, washed up, skipped breakfast, and walked to school. More and more often she was arriving at school late, often missing her first period class completely. Linda would then sit in class and daydream more than she would listen to the teacher. For some reason she could just not handle listening to some old buzzard droning on about prepositional phrases and adjectives and adverbs. What a bore. She rarely communicated with the other students and often ate alone at lunch. If she did sit near other students at lunch, they seemed not to even notice her. After school she would walk home, drop on the couch and watch TV until dinner. Mom came home before dinner and rarely had a pleasant word for anyone. Her work was hard and boring and exhausting. She had time only to relax when she was at home. She nowadays kept to herself more than when they were at home with Dad. Linda was losing touch with her mom, or perhaps she was being shut out. She really didn't care. In fact, there wasn't much she did care about anymore.

Whereas Linda had always been a good student in elementary school and junior high, her report cards now flashed failure. Linda returned home from school early enough, however, to intercept the mail. Her mom never received the letters from school, and, apparently not caring, rarely even inquired as to Linda's progress at school. Grandma was so busy with her sewing and shopping and talking with her friends that she rarely even noticed that Linda was around.

School started promptly at 8:00 a.m., and as Linda plodded sleepily along the sidewalk on her way to school one day, she noticed a group of about five boys standing in a circle and smoking behind the football stadium. With head lowered and eyes downcast, she felt the searing gaze of unwanted attention. All eyes were on Linda as she walked near the group.

"Hey, Linda, How's it goin'?" She was shocked that anyone even knew her name. She turned her head to look at the boys, but continued to walk toward the school, "Hey, what's your hurry? Come on over." Linda didn't know why, but she walked over to the boys.

“Want a drag?” asked the boy who had been talking to her as he offered her his cigarette. She accepted the butt and puffed lightly on it. “I’m Tom,” stated the boy. He then proceeded to introduce the other boys in the group.

“Shouldn’t you guys be in class?” Linda stammered as the boys smiled and snickered.

“Hey, are you kiddin? Why should we be crampin’ our legs behind some desk in some stinkin’ classroom, when we can be out here in the fresh air and sunshine. My tan’s more important to me than some old biddy recitin’ poetry in that prison. You’re lookin’ kinda pale yourself. Your tan could stand a little work, too.”

“Yeah, I guess it could. Don’t you guys get in trouble for not goin’ to class?”

“Are you kiddin? The stiffs in there care even less about me than my old man does. What do they care if I ain’t in class? They probably like it that way. I can be a real bastard to some of those horror stories.”

“Well, what do they do if you don’t go to class?”

“They don’t do nothin’ if they think you’re at home sick. All you gotta do is have a friend call the old bat at the attendance desk, have her pretend to be your old lady and say that you’re home sick for the day. Now take myself, for example. I should probably be hospitalized. I been *sick* twelve days this semester, and we’re still in the first month of school. You oughta try it sometime. It’s painless.”

“Yeah. I might do that. Well, I better go.”

“O.K. See ya.” Linda made it into the building in time for her third period class, where she was supposed to take a test. She hadn’t done any homework for weeks and certainly hadn’t studied for the test. She made an attempt at the exam, but she could barely understand the questions much less think of logical answers. Frustrated, she laid the pen down on the desk, and her head soon followed. She simply slept away the rest of the period.

On the way to school the next morning Linda saw the same group of boys in the same place, but this time there was also a girl with them. “Hey, Linda. How’s it goin’? This, is Michelle. Hey, we’re all gonna go over to Michelle’s house in a little while. You wanna come?”

“Well, I don’t ...”

“Aw, come on. Her mom goes to work at 8:30, and we’ve got the whole place to ourselves after that. Once we get to Michelle’s house, she can call in and excuse you from school. Whata ya say?”

“Sure.” Linda took a cigarette that was offered to her and began to chat with her new-found friends. They were easy to talk with, and she felt comfortable with them. They accepted her and showed a genuine interest in her. She felt good when she was with them and even began to smile again.

At Michelle’s house Michelle made the phone call to school. “This is Mrs. Foster calling in for Linda. She’ll be home all day today. I think she just has a cold, but I feel that I’d better let her get some rest.” Michelle hung up, and everyone had a good laugh at having once again conned the system. Everyone made themselves at home. The music blared, the shades were drawn, and the pipe made the rounds. Although guilt tugged at that little

voice in her head telling her what was right, Linda was having a great time and soon forgot that she was even supposed to be sitting in a classroom. At about the time school was to let out for the day one of the boys at the party drove Linda to her home in his van. She was happy and high when she went into the house. She breezed by her grandmother without saying a word when she saw her in the kitchen. She locked herself in her room, put her earbuds in place, and lazed on the bed, lost in thoughts more pleasant than those she had had over the past year.

Linda woke up late the next morning and rushed to get to school. She wasn't anxious to get to class but was curious about what her friends would be doing that day. When she passed behind the stadium, she didn't see her group. It's true she was over a half hour late, but she didn't think they'd have left this early. Maybe they had something special planned. She continued on to school and reported to the attendance office to pick up her admit. She noticed the admit was an *excused* admit, and she smiled as she proceeded to her second period class. She sat through classes which now meant nothing to her. She was lost in math class. She'd done none of the homework and had read none of the lessons. There was no way she would ever catch up or even catch on. She started thinking about what a waste it was for her to even attend the class. Why did she come anyway? It was simply a habit she had developed since first grade. She had *always* gone to classes. Her mind wandered to yesterday's party and never wandered back.

Later that day in the hall, she noticed one of the guys she had seen at the party yesterday walking toward her. Rather surprised, she said, "Hey, what are you doing here?"

"Whata ya mean? I go to school here."

"I mean—well, I kinda thought you didn't go to classes."

"Well, I gotta go to some of them. I usually go to Autos, and I have to go to Driver's Ed. They drop you outta there if you miss Range three times."

"Oh. Are you going to a class now?"

"I don't know. I was thinking of going out to the forest preserve. A lot of the guys are partying out there this afternoon. Hey, you wanna go out with me? We can get a ride with Steve."

"Sure." There were only a few hours of school left. She had come to school late. She might as well leave a little early.

The party at the first preserve was great. Plenty of people, plenty of laughs, and plenty of dope. Linda didn't feel at all comfortable with dope at first. If she acted weird though when they offered it, they might think her odd. She wanted to be liked by these people. She was having more fun than she'd had in years. Why blow it?

Everyone sat around on the picnic tables smoking, drinking and laughing. A couple hours into the party a squad car rolled up. A cop stepped out and walked over to the group. "O.K. Pack it up and move on!" Linda's heart was in her throat as she trembled at the prospect of what might happen. The others around her, though, simply laughed it off. In fact, they mumbled curses at the cop and openly made obscene gestures at him. Linda was kind of puzzled. The cop simply stood there with his hands on his hips and watched everyone pack up. He didn't react to anything anyone did.

Linda asked Tom. "Why doesn't he say anything?"

"I think he's trying to control himself. His only job's to keep us outa here. He'd only bother us if we had hard stuff. Besides, what can he do to us? Call our parents? Ha!"

Linda slept late the next morning and got to school about third period. Her day went all right until she went to her afternoon classes. One teacher wouldn't let her into class without an admit. The lady really gave her a hard time and refused to even listen to her. She had to go to the attendance office to get her admit and found when she got there that they had no admit for her. She was told to see Dean Aarons.

"Linda. You missed a lot of classes yesterday. What's the problem?"

"Well. I felt sick yesterday and had to go home."

"When you're sick, you go to the nurse. She takes care of you here and sends you home if it's necessary."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know that."

"It's important that we know where you are during the school day. Does your mom know you went home?"

"Yeah. Sure. I talked to her last night."

"Why didn't she call to excuse you?"

"You mean she didn't call? She told me she would"

"What about your first period class yesterday?"

"What about it?"

"Why weren't you there?"

"I was. You can ask anybody in the class."

"I asked the teacher. She said you weren't there."

"Well, she's so senile she probably don't even know my name."

"Linda. First of all, Ms. Kramer is only forty-years-old and hardly senile. Whatever kind of problem you're having here, I hope you get it straightened out soon. If you don't understand the rules, read the student handbook. If you have a personal problem, there are plenty of people here willing to talk with you and help you out. Your teacher would be more than willing to help you with your school work. If there's anything you need, you only have to ask. Now about the absences. You've got four detentions to serve. Do you understand how to take care of these?"

"Yeah. I guess so."

"Take these admits. They'll get you back into classes."

Linda took her admits but didn't return to class. She went to the cafeteria instead to see who she could find. Michelle was at a table with a couple of other girls.

"Hi Linda. Whada ya look so down about?"

"I just got nailed by the dean."

"So?"

"So? They're kinda hard on the kids here, aren't they?"

"Hard? Are you kiddin'? What can they do to us?"

"Well, I got some detentions."

“So what? You don’t go to classes.. Why should you go to detention hall?”

“Won’t I get suspended or something?”

“Maybe. But then you don’t have to go to classes at all. Right?”

“They call your parents when you get suspended, don’t they?”

“Yeah. So what’s a little heat at home? You’re used to that, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. I guess so.”

“Hey. We’re having a little get-together at Turner Park tonight. Ya gonna make it?”

“I don’t think so. My mom won’t let me out at night?”

“What?” Are you kiddin”? What kinda mom you got?”

“She wants me to do homework and help with housework and stuff at night.”

“Since when do you do homework?”

“Well, Mom thinks I do it.”

“Look, if you’re smart, you’ll tell your mom where to get off. Nobody, but nobody, stays home nights.”

Linda went home after school, but, thinking she’d avoid a confrontation with her mom, she left the house before her mom got home from work. She then headed for the park. The night was a mix of the usual beer, dope, and happy friends. Linda didn’t feel a tinge of guilt until she headed home. Would her mom still be up? She found out as soon as she opened the front door.

“Where in the hell have you been?”

“Just out.”

“Just out where? You know I expect you to be home at night. And if you do go out you had damned well better let me know where you’re going.”

“Ma, everybody goes out at night.”

“Without letting their parents know they’re going out? I don’t think. . .”

What followed was the biggest fight Linda had ever had with her mom. She had never really fought with her mother before and had always accepted what her mom had told her to do. She now felt confined and frustrated when her mom told her what to do. A heated feeling came over her when her mom gave her orders. Nowadays she felt more like rebelling than she did following what her mom told her to do. Linda began to develop an attitude that she was going to do only what was important to herself. Besides, her friends now meant more to her than a mother, who was never around anyway.

The argument ended at last with Linda’s mother warning her that she’d have to suffer the consequences of her actions. She was grounded for two weeks, and her allowance was cut to lunch money only. It didn’t make a great deal of difference. Linda had already decided that she was going to do as she pleased. What could her mom do, anyway? Chain her to her bed?

Linda got to school early for a change. After a fitfull sleep she’d decided that things might be a little easier for her at home if she didn’t have problems at school. She met with the dean before school and got her admits, her detentions and her lecture. She told the dean what he wanted to hear and she half-believed what she said herself. She kind of did want to try to attend classes. She went to her first period class

and listened for a change. What she heard however was completely foreign to her. She didn't have the slightest idea what the teacher was talking about, and when it came time to do the exercise, she was completely lost. She could have used some help but the teacher pretty much ignored her. It's true that she hadn't been to class for a while, but the least the teacher could do would be to help her as much as she was helping the other kids. Linda left the class discouraged. She felt the teacher was prejudiced against her because she'd been cutting the class. How could she ever get ahead if the teacher was against her? Her other classes weren't much better. She was totally lost in all her subjects, and by the end of the day she realized how much she didn't know and how it would be nearly impossible to catch up.

Linda didn't even bother to go home after school. She went to Michelle's house and found most of the gang there. Tom's parents were out of town and wouldn't be back for several days, and the group had been planning a three-day party at Tom's house. At this point Linda had given up on school and couldn't have cared less about her home. She was ready to leave with the group for Tom's house and party hearty.

Linda had the time of her life over the next several days. There were no restrictions, no one nagging at her, no boring classes, nothing to bother her. It was great. Her mother, in the mean time, was going out of her mind. The police had been able to give her no information as to Linda's whereabouts. The school wasn't much better. They could only tell Linda's mom that Linda hadn't reported to any classes. Linda's mom didn't go to work for three days while Linda played. She spent most of her time cruising the streets in her car looking for Linda. She also spent time near the school asking kids who might know Linda where she might be. She drove through the parks and forest preserves where the kids hung out. She hounded the police and the hospitals for any word of Linda.

Tom's parents were due home soon, and the party had to break up. Most kids were returning home to parents who had long ago given up on them. They had at one time put so much time and energy into trying to discipline their children without success that they had finally given up. Linda's mom had not yet given up on Linda. She loved her daughter, and, although she realized that she hadn't been spending as much time with Linda as she should have, she didn't want to see Linda hurt.

Mrs. Foster had hardly slept over the last several days and broke down entirely when Linda walked in the door. She sobbed endlessly as she hugged her daughter. The hugging and sobbing ended, though, as Linda broke away from her mom and went to her room. Her mom followed, and a long discussion ensued. Her mom, of course, wanted to know where she had been and what she had been doing. The only response she could get out of Linda, however, was that she had been with friends. Linda just lay on her bed and stared at the ceiling. She didn't want to talk with her mom. She just wanted to be left alone. When her mother, out of frustration and rage, grabbed her daughter and shook her, Linda jumped up from the bed, shoved her mom away, and let the profanity fly. She screamed at her mom as she'd never screamed before. Linda's mom simply cried and stared at her in shock as she realized the change that had come over her once quiet and once cooperative daughter.

The night passed with Linda simply staying in her room listening to music before going to bed. Her mother woke her early the next morning and ordered her to get dressed. When Linda was ready, they got in the car and drove to school.

“You don’t have to take me to school, Ma. I can handle it myself.”

“You certainly haven’t handled it so far. I had no idea you’d been missing so much school. We’re going to get you straightened out with the dean right away.”

“Oh, sure. What can he do?”

“We’ll see.”

In the dean’s office Linda simply folded her arms, hung her head and stared at the floor.

“Linda, your mother brought you here this morning because she wants to help you. I also want to help you. I’d like nothing better than to see you succeed in high school and come to enjoy it. Before we can work to solve your problem, though, we have to know what it is. It’s obvious that you miss a lot of school. That’s certainly a serious problem, but it’s usually just an indication that there is something more serious at work. There’s a reason why you’re truant, or possibly several reasons. If we can discover why you’re truant., we may be able to help you. Can you give us a hint? Can you tell us why you don’t go to classes?”

Linda sat silently and continued to stare at the floor.

“Linda, we sincerely want to help you, but we need your cooperation to do that. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t be able to talk with me. What do you do when you aren’t in classes?”

Linda bolted from the chair and strode toward the door, “I ain’t stayin’ here! You can talk all you want....”

The dean jumped up to block Linda’s exit. “Sit down! You’re not going to leave here until we’ve come to an understanding. I said sit down!”

Linda’s head drooped again, and she slumped into her chair.

“Linda, do you know why you cut classes?”

“Yeah, sure. But you wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me.”

“Um.”

Linda’s mother spoke up, “Linda, we’re only trying to help you. Please talk with us.”

“Where do you go when you’re not in classes, Linda?” the dean asked.

“Just around.”

“Where specifically do you go?”

“I go to the library.”

“Why the library?”

“Classes are boring. I’d rather just study on my own in the library.”

“You mean you’re studying in the library on your own?”

“Yeah.”

“How do you know what to study?”

“I talk with my friends. I’m caught up with just about everything.”

“What kind of grade do you think you’ll get in English this marking period?”

“Oh, probably a C, maybe a B.”

“I talked with your English teacher yesterday, and she’s been wondering where you’ve been. You’ve missed several quizzes, haven’t turned in your daily homework, and haven’t completed one major project this semester. Your grade in that course now is as low as it could possibly be. You’re fooling yourself if you think you’re teaching yourself.”

“Mr. Aarons, I haven’t seen any of Linda’s books at home. I don’t think she’s...”

“I do all my work in school!” Linda shouted angrily.

“Let’s stop fooling around, Linda. You don’t spend your days in the library. I think it’s important, though, that you and your mother sit down later and discuss this. Your mom deserves to know where you’ve been spending your time. Wherever it is, it certainly can’t be to your benefit. Now look. I’d like to get you back into school and help you salvage some of your credits. You have a lot of time to go yet this semester, and there’s no reason why you can’t at least pass your courses and, with a little hard work, you may still even get some decent grades. You know if you fail a lot of courses this semester you’re simply going to have to make them up next semester or next year. Almost all the courses you’re taking are required, and you’re gonna have to pass them sooner or later. You might as well get them over with now so you can take some more interesting courses next year. How do you feel about going back to classes now? Do you feel you’ll have any problems?”

Linda didn’t respond.

“Linda? What do you see as your problems when you return to classes?”

“Other than the fact that my teachers all hate me, none.”

“Your teachers are there to help you learn. They don’t hate you. You’ve got to understand though that they help those students most who are making an effort. If you’re in class and making an attempt to do the work, they’ll help you just like everyone else. Ask questions. Ask your teachers if you can meet with them after school. It will be very hard to go back to some of your classes after you’ve been out for so long, but once you’ve been through a complete day of classes, you’ll feel that you’ve accomplished something. And the longer you continue to go to classes regularly the easier it will become for you. You’ve got to get into the routine of attending. Do you understand?”

“Sure.”

“There’s a lot of help available for you here, Linda. Your teachers will be more than willing to help you with your schoolwork. You’ve got to make the first move, though, and ask them for help. There also are three social workers in the building. Their only job is to talk with students who are having problems. If you have a personal problem or school-related problem you want to talk about, stop in and see one of them. If you like, I can take you down and introduce you sometime. It’s also possible that an-

other academic program may be more appropriate for you. There are a lot of alternative programs in the district. If you can't make it on your own in regular classes, it may be best that you take some tests so we can place you in another program. You've got to understand, too, Linda, that this is your last chance. You've got an opportunity to help yourself and go to classes regularly. If you can't do that, and your mother can't get you to go to school, and I can't get you to go to classes, I have to file a truancy petition in court, and then the juvenile authorities will see that you do go to classes. Do you understand what that means, Linda?"

"What can they do to me?" Linda scoffed.

"It's possible they could take you out of your home and place you in a detention center for girls. Then you wouldn't have a choice as to whether or not you went to school. I hope you can make it on your own, Linda. You've still got a chance to pull yourself together."

Dean Aarons took Linda to her first period class and explained to her teacher that she would be attending on a regular basis in the future. Linda stayed in class and, in fact, went to all of her other classes that day. It was a long day and a frustrating day. She didn't relate well to the kids in classes. She daydreamed of her friends. They were probably out having a good time. Here she was stuck in crummy classrooms listening to boring garbage. She couldn't understand what the teachers were talking about and didn't feel like reading the textbooks or doing the exercises. The day was miserable.

Linda walked home slowly that day. She stopped by Michelle's house to see if she was home. "Michelle, the dean was telling me about going to court. Is he straight?"

"Court? What can they do to ya? Look, I went through that crap last year, and you'll be O.K. if you play the game."

"Whata ya mean 'Play the game'?"

"Well, you don't have anything to worry about until you go to court. The first time you go to court they don't do nothin' but have a hearing before a judge. The judge'll probably yell at you, but that's good. It makes it easier for you to cry. If you cry and tell them what they want to hear, you're home free. Just tell them you're sorry and that you want to go back to classes. Say 'yes' to anything they want you to do and act as though you mean it. The worst they ever do is assign you to a probation officer. That's no big deal either. They're supposed to watch your attendance at school, but half the time they don't even check with the school. Just lie and tell them you're going to classes. That should get you by. If not, you might have to go to some classes sometime so it looks like there's still hope for you. If they think you're making progress, they leave you alone."

"The dean mentioned something about a detention center. Does anybody ever go there?"

"Well, sometimes, but if you're cool, you can beat that rap. Hey, there's a party at Cindy's tonight. You gonna make it?"

"You kiddin'? If I don't get home today, my ma'll have the F.B.I. out lookin' for me."

“Yeah. Ya better play it cool until the heat’s off.”

“See ya.”

“Take it easy.”

Linda continued to attend classes for several days, but then began to slip back into her habit of getting up late and missing her morning classes. She missed increasingly more classes each day, and within two weeks was attending only one or two classes on the days she even went to school at all. She happened to be sitting in the cafeteria one day when Dean Aarons walked through and noticed her. “Let’s go to my office, Linda.”

In her conference with the dean, Linda was suspended from school, and her mother came in for a conference a few days later. They talked with the dean about the suspension and about the court proceedings Linda was now to go through.

The dean did file a court petition, and Linda found herself sitting in a courtroom a week after she had been suspended from school. She and her mother sat on a bench waiting for Linda’s name to be called. A large woman wearing a police uniform was standing at the front of the courtroom and seemed to be in charge of everything. This lady called Linda’s name after Linda and her mother had been waiting for over two hours. They were ushered in to a small conference room where they met a pleasant-looking middle-aged woman. She introduced herself and explained that she was the juvenile officer who would be working with Linda. She then began to ask both Linda and her mother a lot of questions about their home life. She also wanted to know about Linda’s attitudes toward school and what she did with her time—both in and out of school. The conference lasted only fifteen minutes and ended with the warning that Linda now had to attend school regularly or there would probably be further action taken against her.

All the way home in the car, Linda’s mother yelled at her. She couldn’t understand Linda’s behavior and demanded that she turn herself around, get rid of the friends that she had, and attend all of her classes at school. Rather than yell back and argue with her mom, Linda simply turned her back to her mother and ignored her as she folded her arms and stared out the window. Linda’s thoughts and emotions were confused. She was beginning to hate her mom for always getting on her case and for always yelling at her. She had a strong desire to do just the opposite of what her mom was telling her to do. On the other hand, she felt kind of guilty about running around all day when most other kids her age were in school. She also, however, didn’t want to miss out on what her friends were doing during the day. At the back of her mind also was the thought of what may happen to her in court. Oh well, if Michelle didn’t seem too worried about the court situation, why should she be worried? What could they do anyway?

Linda’s school attendance continued in the same pattern as it had in the past. She was good about going to classes for the first few days after her suspension and court appearance, but then she slid back into going to fewer and fewer classes. Linda was spending most of her time out of school while at the same time lying to both her mother and her probation officer about the fact that she wasn’t going to classes. Lin-

da's dean at the high school, however, was in contact with Linda's probation officer and her mother about her attendance. Linda's mother had a hard time believing that Linda, after all the trouble she had been in, still wasn't attending school. She still wanted to give Linda another chance, however.

Regardless of her mother's wishes, Linda and her mom were sitting in court again a week later. They were seated on a bench waiting for Linda's name to be called. The whole morning passed without Linda hearing her name, and the court recessed for a lunch break. Linda's mother went to get some sandwiches, and Linda stayed in the courtroom chatting with some of the kids that she knew who were also waiting for their hearings. There were at least twenty-five other kids in the courtroom with their parents. They had been referred to court for such offenses as vandalism, shoplifting, drug possession, assault, car theft, and truancy. Linda was having a great time talking and laughing with her friends and was even making a great deal of progress at making new friends. One of the girls she was talking with was having a party that night, and Linda was planning with her how she'd be able to get out of the house so that she'd be able to attend. Linda was interrupted when her name was called by the court officer. She chucked her half-eaten sandwich under the bench and smilingly strode over to where her mom was sitting.

Together they walked in to the judge's chambers. The judge sat at one end of a long conference table while Linda and her mom sat at the other. There were many other people crowded around the table, but Linda knew only two of them—her probation officer and Mr. Aarons, the dean. The judge, rather indifferently, asked for a summary of the case. Some person near him recited a bunch of nonsense having to do with dates and case numbers and other details of which Linda was not the slightest bit interested. The judge then asked the dean to give a summary of Linda's attendance at school. The dean handed the judge some papers and then went on to summarize Linda's attendance from the beginning of the year. He also described what the school had been doing to try to get Linda to go to school. The probation officer then gave her report. She stated that she'd met with Linda once before and after that had made several appointments to see Linda again. She also stated that Linda had failed to show up at many appointments. To Linda's surprise her probation officer also reported on several incidents that Linda had been a part of that involved the police. She knew that she and her friends were often hassled by the police, and they'd even been taken to the station several times. She had no idea, however, that her probation officer knew of these incidents.

The judge then asked Linda why she didn't go to school.

"It's so boring."

"You're obviously aware of the fact that under the law you must attend school. Why have you so openly disobeyed the law?" Linda simply hung her head and sort of shrugged her shoulders. "You realize that your getting off to such a bad start at such a young age is almost a sure sign that you'll have a pretty miserable life later on. In order to ensure that you at least have a chance to straighten yourself out, attend school on a regular basis, and prepare yourself adequately to be capable of leading a responsi-

ble life, I'm going to assign you to the Avalon School for Girls. Please take Linda downstairs, Matron."

A large woman in a police uniform walked over to Linda, and, gently tugging at her arm, lead her out of the room. The tears were welling up in Linda's eyes and the lump in her throat prevented her from speaking at all. Her mother was sobbing uncontrollably and hugging Linda close. The police matron said softly that she could bring Linda some night clothes and a toothbrush. She'd be at the courthouse for a few more hours. She then gently pulled Linda from her mother. Linda reached out for her mother and began crying hysterically. The matron took her down several flights of stairs. They ended up in a basement full of jail cells. The matron opened the door of the closest cell and led Linda in. "You'll be here for a few hours until one of the ladies comes to take you to your new home. In a while I'll bring the things down to you that your mother brings over."

Linda simply sat on the cot and sobbed, wishing she were anywhere else but sitting in that cell. The matron came an hour later with a paper bag containing a night gown, toothbrush, and a few other personal items. Shortly after, a lady she had never seen before came and led her outside to a van driven by a man wearing a brown uniform and a cap. The lady got into the back seat with Linda, and they then drove on for hours. Linda slept for most of the ride but woke up when they arrived at a gate guarded by a uniformed man. He looked into the van and then opened the gate. The car drove up a long, winding lane and then pulled up to an old, red brick building. The lady led Linda out of the car, into the building and down a long, lonely and dimly lit hallway. Linda was shown into a small room with only a cot, a desk and a small bathroom.

"You'll spend the night here, Linda. I'll bring you a sandwich and some milk in a little while. I'll come to pick you up at 6 a.m. tomorrow. I'll take you over to the shower room, and we'll get you cleaned up. For the next several days you'll be going through a series of tests. After your shower, you'll receive a complete physical exam. After that you'll have a session with our school psychologist, and then I'll introduce you to our social worker. In three or four days you'll be transferred to one of the dormitories, and you'll be meeting some of the girls. You'll also be assigned to a job. Here, before you go to sleep you might want to read over these rules. Basically it tells you when you'll sleep, when you'll get up, when you'll eat, what classes you'll attend in the school, and what hours you'll work on your job."

"What do the girls do on their free time?"

"Well, Linda, you'll find that you don't have much free time here, especially at the beginning. Most of your free time will be spent in a supervised study situation where you'll be doing your homework. We do have a recreation room where some of the girls spend their time, but we consider that a privilege. Here, Linda, you have to earn the right to be able to decide how you'll spend your time. You'll learn in a hurry. Well, I'll go get that sandwich."

Linda lay back on the cot, put her arms across her forehead, and stared at the ceiling. Her thoughts drifted to what her friends would be doing about now. She wished that she were anywhere else but locked in this hole of a room. Maybe, she thought, one

of her girlfriends would be transferred up here soon. But no, they were probably too smart. They had been around and had learned to play the game. Here Linda had no choice. There was no game to play. She simply had to follow the established routine.

She wondered now what her mom would be doing. She was probably lying on the couch watching TV. Linda could see her mom eating a bowl of popcorn and watching an old movie. Her Grandma was undoubtedly sitting in her chair working on an afghan.

What time was it, anyway? Linda thought. She really had no idea what the time was. She could only tell by glancing over at the single window that it was awfully dark outside. Her locked door swung open, and the lady walked in to give her a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk.

“See you at six, Linda.”

“Goodnight, Ma’am.”



[The social cutter is a truant student who only occasionally ditches classes. If this is the category of truancy under which you would fall, be careful. Truancy is a habit which is just as addictive and just as damaging as a cigarette or drug habit. Cutting classes can be fun in the beginning and even a little adventurous. However, the more you cut classes, the more you want to cut in the future. It becomes easier for you, and after a while you cut more freely and (even though you may feel a little guilty) you begin to see nothing wrong with cutting classes. You’ve got to stop cutting classes early on in your habit, or you’re going to be stuck with a habit that will certainly hurt you and may even end your high school career. It would serve you well to consider the harm your truancy can do—not only now while you’re still a student but later on in your life when you’re twenty, thirty, forty, and older.]

SHOWING UP: YOUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT

by

Dan L. Miller

How would you like your school to adopt an unlimited cut policy? In other words, you would be allowed to cut class or attend class as you wished without penalty. This policy was put into effect recently by a health teacher at Temple University. His students were complaining long and hard about “Mickey Mouse” attendance regulations and felt that

they were mature enough to decide for themselves when they should be in class and when they should not. The teacher then decided to let the students cut class whenever they wanted without penalty. He gave everyone class outlines and study questions covering all the material in the course. Students' grades would be based on tests that were taken, and all the test questions would be taken from the study questions that were distributed. Students who attended classes would be discussing the study questions. Those who did not attend had the option of seeing the teacher during his office hours and discussing the questions. (Only three students came to see the teacher during the entire semester).

At the end of the semester the teacher went over his attendance records and compared them to the students' grades. He found that there was a very strong relationship between class attendance and grades. The more classes a student attended, the higher was his grade. ...The more classes a student cut, the lower was his grade. Upon hearing the results of the teacher's study, one student suggested that usually the good students get the better grades and also attend class more faithfully. In checking students' total grade point averages, he found that whether the student was a good student or a poor student made no difference. If that student cut classes, his class grade turned out to be lower than the students who did attend class.

Other research has also been done to determine the relationship between grades and attendance. Carl Ziegler wrote a book titled *School Attendance as a Factor in School Progress*. His research study looked at the relationship between the attendance of 307 seventh graders and their school grades. Ziegler, too, found a strong, positive relationship between grades and attendance. Whether the student's absences were truant absences or excused absences, the more classes a student missed, the lower were his or her grades.

Another researcher, Richard Rozelle, did a study at Evanston Township High School in Evanston, Illinois. Rozelle simply looked into the school records to get his data and make his comparisons. He compared the grades of the high school students with the records of their attendance. Rozelle, too, found absences to have a direct effect on grades, and he went on to cite eleven other studies conducted over the last fifty years at the elementary school level, the high school level, and the college level that showed a direct relationship between the number of class absences and the quality of a student's grades. Generally, the more classes missed, the lower is one's grade.

Even without looking at research studies, common sense would tell you that absence from school leads to failure. So what else does absence from school and truancy tell us about the student? Linda Christmas, in an article for *The Times Educational Supplement*, states that "truancy by a child is a warning that he may have emotional problems and that he may be developing delinquent tendencies. At least half the children who play truant repeatedly are maladjusted, and one truant in two commits other offenses."

So what is Ms. Christmas saying? She states that truancy is a warning by the student that something is wrong. In homes or in office buildings which are equipped with smoke detectors, a loud alarm blares when there is a trace of smoke indicating a fire. That alarm continues to sound until someone comes to solve the problem by putting out the fire. The same warning system is built into a human being. To alert parents to the fact that something is wrong, babies and small children cry just as loudly as a smoke alarm. When the child turns into a young adult, the crying turns into other kinds of warnings. The teenager who is truant from school is sending out a signal to his parents and to the people at school that something is wrong. A problem exists that must be solved. Many times this warning goes unheeded, or it is heeded too late. The student may already have developed so many problems that it is no longer a simple task to correct them and get the student functioning effectively once again.

Ms. Christmas also states in her article that not only is truancy a warning of emotional problems, but it also is a signal of other behavior problems. She states that for half of all truant students, truancy is not their only vice. Because of some emotional problem or personal problem or character flaw or personality deviation, truant students also become involved in other problems—shoplifting, vandalism, drugs, etc. In a research study conducted by M. J. Tyerman of 137 truant students, he found conclusively that truancy was associated with other forms of delinquent behavior. In studying his set of truant students over a six-year period, he found that by the end of the study 64 of his 137 students had police records while 24 of his students had been removed from the home and placed in detention homes or reform schools.

Not only can truancy have a very harmful effect on you while you are in school but consider the results of wasted years in school on your later life. Many researchers have studied adults who had been truant in school and analyzed their life's problems. A man named Lummis did a study of 1000 men being inducted into the army. He found that those men who had been truants in high school were the same men who exhibited the worst conduct while in the army. When these men left the army, it was generally found that they frequently had long periods of unemployment.

In a long-term study in St. Louis, Robins and Ratcliff studied the lives of men who had been truant in school. They generally found that truancy in school lead to the following adult problems: failure in school, dropping out of school, leaving home before the age of eighteen, early marriage, low wages, job problems, marital problems, depression and anxiety, drug addiction and/or alcoholism, criminal activity, and violence. If you look back at the list of problems that truant students have as adults, you'll see that there is a logical progression from one problem to another. Because of a lack of attendance in classes, the truant student fails at school, falls far behind in classwork and credits, and eventually gets so frustrated that he drops out. Because of the desire of the truant to be independent and on his own, he leaves home early to live with friends or to get his own place. Many truants feel that their problems will be over once they are free from the hassles of school and parents. They soon

find that they are very wrong. The same types of problems they experienced in high school follow them into the job and marriage.

Business and industry demand promptness and regular attendance. The truant usually experiences job problems and often moves from one job to another, either getting fired or getting discouraged with the type of work he has to do. Low wages plague the dropout and truant because he's only able to get the types of jobs that few others will take. Because of the frustration and problems on the job, marital problems soon follow. Of course, when people get married, they want a nice place to live, comfortable furniture, decent clothes, a nice car or two, appliances and luxuries, electronics, TVs, etc. These things take money, and that's one thing of which the truant and dropout have very little. Friction arises between husband and wife as to what things to buy now and what things to wait for; how, to pay the bills for food, utilities, taxes, house payments or rent, gas, car loans, etc.; and how to get a better and higher paying job. Problem builds upon problem and the truant tends to hide or smother the problems in drugs and alcohol. One won't notice the problems if one can't feel the pain. Many people at this point turn to criminality in order to get more money and better lifestyles. Theft, embezzlement, con games, gambling, and other criminal acts creep into the truant's life, and it's all downhill from there.

Although the study by Robins and Ratcliff dealt with men who had been truant, girls who have been truant do not fare much better. Even if a girl were to plan on early marriage and to plan on being supported for most of her life, no one can predict the loss of a husband through death, divorce, or incarceration. More and more women today are supporting themselves or, at least, contributing substantially to the family income. Any girl, truant or not, must be prepared at all times in her life to support herself and also, possibly, several children.

One must realize that the types of problems that begin with truancy only get worse and cause still more problems of an even more serious nature later in life. Most people expect to be happy in their lives and to live comfortably. If that is a goal of your's, make every effort possible to solve your problems now. The longer you go in life without solving emotional or personal problems or flaws of character or personality, the more serious your problems become, the harder are your problems to solve, and the unhappier you get. Considering that your life and your state of unhappiness will not improve until you change something about your attitudes and/or habits, it would be wise to work as hard as possible now to solve your problems rather than to wait until you one day discover they can no longer be solved.



[If you have problems and are unhappy, you are not alone. Everyone has problems. Some problems are more serious than others, and some people have more problems than others, but everyone has to face up to solving their problems. It's important to realize, also, that it is never too late to solve problems you've left unresolved. Granted, it may be more difficult and take more effort to solve those problems, but sooner or later you're going to have to buckle down and put all your effort into getting back on the right track. In order to do this it's helpful to understand two things: What is causing the problem and how to help yourself solve the problem.

The following essay is intended to help you resolve your attendance problem. What is causing your attendance problem? Why do you cut classes?]

SKIPPING', DITCHIN', AND CUTTIN': HOW TO TROUNCE TRUANCY

by

Dan L. Miller

How many students are usually truant from classes on any given day? Generally, the percentage of unexcused absences for most schools runs from 2 percent to 5 percent. In an average sized high school of 1500 students, this means that, on any given day, 30 to 75 students would have missed one or more class sessions without an excuse. Thirty to 75 students may seem like quite a few, but consider the fact that while those 30 students are out of class there are 1470 students who are attending all of their classes.

Why is it that 1470 students attend all of their classes as they should while 30 students skip out? What's the difference between the type of student who stays in class and the type of student who skips class. There is something that the student who attends classes has which the truant student does not have. What is it?

If you've missed classes without an excuse, can you tell what it is that makes you skip classes while most other students attend classes faithfully? This something that is missing in the truant student represents a need that must be fulfilled. If a student misses a class, there is a reason for it. That reason must be identified if the truant student is to solve his attendance problem. Once the reason is identified, it should be obvious what the nature of the need is that must be fulfilled.

For instance, take the case of Holly. Her schedule of classes was such that she had four classes in the morning that occupied her time from 8:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. She then had several free periods, and her next class, Speech, did not start until 1:30. She had over two hours free before she had to report to her Speech class. The fact that Holly lived near the school made it easy for her to go home. While at home, she ate lunch and turned on the TV. Her mother worked during the day and wasn't home to supervise Holly. After lounging at home for a couple of hours and becoming interested in her TV programs, Holly couldn't move her butt off the couch to return to school and attend her Speech class. As the weeks passed, she began to miss the class more and more frequently. Once she had reached a point in the semester at which she was failing the course, she felt even less motivated to attend. Holly had fallen into a pattern of truancy which she couldn't correct.

In a case such as this, the reason for Holly's truancy was twofold. One reason for the truancy was a lack of will-power and responsibility on Holly's part. She should have been able to stay in school and keep herself occupied with studying or with school-related activities until her Speech class started, or she should have been able to leave her home in time to make it to Speech. A second reason for Holly's truancy was the fact that the school had given her a bad schedule. Generally, students should not have that much free time between classes because many students can wander off-task. The reasons then for Holly's truancy were her inability to return to classes and the fact that the school had given her a bad schedule. Holly, through her truancy, expressed a need for help. She needed a better schedule to help her attend classes regularly. She also needed more structure in her midday activities. She had to plan her free time so that she was in school and ready to attend Speech class when it began.

Why do students skip class? Holly's reasons for truancy were obvious, but, generally, reasons for truancy fall into three categories:

1. Some students miss classes because of home and family problems,
2. Some students miss classes because of school-related problems, and,
3. Some students miss classes because of personal problems, behavior problems, or habits.

In some cases, a student may have a home life which is so chaotic that he can not concentrate on school. Take Kevin, for instance. He had been raised during most of his life by only his mother, since his father had abandoned them shortly after Kevin was born. Kevin's mother had remarried recently, and Kevin's step-father made life more miserable for both Kevin and his mother than it had been before his mother had remarried. His step-father was away from home a lot, but when he was around, he was usually drunk or stoned. Kevin's

mother and step-father argued a lot and even physically fought at times. He step-father even beat him at times, and Kevin certainly didn't have a close relationship with him. He no longer had a close relationship with his mother either. She worked a lot and didn't have much time for Kevin when she was at home. It was hard for Kevin to live at home with this situation.

Kevin hated life at home. In cases like Kevin's, where parents have little time for their child and don't seem to care very much about their offspring, students will look for attention and acceptance elsewhere. Students can easily get attention from adults and peers at school through misbehavior and truancy. Although adults at school don't approve of such behavior, a student who misbehaves may be getting something he needs, for at least adults will be paying attention to him and working with him. The student's truancy and misconduct may also continue because he knows that his parents care so little about him that he will receive no consequences at home. "Why not mess around all day and have a good time? My parents couldn't care less and probably wouldn't do anything to me if they did find out."

In cases such as these, a student also may be trying to get the attention of his parents. If he's truant from school, the school puts pressure on the parents to get involved with their child or forces them to attend parent conferences convened to deal with the student's truancy.

So in a case like Kevin's, what is the reason for his truancy? Kevin's behavior is immature and irresponsible, his home life is unstable, and his parents are not actively involved in his life. All of these reasons contribute to Kevin's missing school. What actions must Kevin take if he is to solve his problem with truancy? If he could secure a comfortable home life, it would help, but he also must realize that he cannot change his parents. He can sit down and talk with them and try to get their support and try to make them aware of his needs, but if he fails, he must realize that he is on his own. He's responsible for his own life, and, if he is interested in having some success at school and in having some chance at a decent future, he's going to have to pull himself together, make a great deal of effort to understand his problems, and set out to help himself and run his own life responsibly. If he does need adult help in managing his school activities and personal life, he can ask for help from teachers, counselors, social workers, administrators, and others at school. The staff at any school is there to help every student grow into a responsible adult. They will not refuse to help a young person in need of assistance.

There is also the case of parents who care a great deal for their children, but who, because of jobs and other responsibilities, are unable to spend the time with their sons or daughters needed to provide a close relationship and adequate supervision. Because of the excessive absence of the parent, the adolescent often is left to his own devices. Adolescents in a situation such as this often become more and more irresponsible and have a tendency to miss increasingly more school.

Other problems with parents also contribute to truancy. Some parents are over-protective or overly-strict. Most teenagers, by nature, are rebellious, and many resist authority figures to the extent that they openly fight with parents, teachers, and others who have authority over them. If, for instance, a student's parents are strict about school attendance, they will expect their child to be in every class every day—sometimes even if the child is ill. In a

case like this, some teenagers rebel against their parents' power over them. The teenager is a growing person who becomes more independent the older he gets. Many teens try to prove to their parents, themselves, and their friends just how independent they are. They do this by doing things that they know will anger their parents. Few parents condone truancy. Some teens try to show their parents that they can be independent and that they can decide for themselves how to run their own lives.

The sternness of the parents and the inability of the student to accept the standards of his parents may be the reason for truancy in a case such as this. The action that the student can take to help solve his problem of cutting classes is to communicate. He should be talking with his parents about the management of his life and his need for some freedom and responsibility. If his parents will not work with him to ease the pressures, then the student must realize that his life will be much happier and more free of hassle if he learns to live cooperatively with his parents. He must understand why his parents are so stern. It may be because they are afraid. They are afraid of their son getting hurt. They love their child and are afraid to let him make his own decisions about friends, school attendance, dating, etc., because they are afraid their child will make mistakes which will hurt him. They also, through experience, feel that they know what is best for their child. They were adolescents once, too, and know what is good and bad for their child's development. Without letting the adolescent learn for himself, or without trying to communicate and reason with their child, they simply decree what their child will do in order to help him avoid harm and disappointment. It will help the adolescent with this type of parent to understand that this dictatorial parenting is the result of love. Beyond communicating with his parents and trying to develop mutual understanding, there is little the adolescent can do at home to help the situation. Trying to exert his independence through truancy or some other form of misconduct is going to cause more difficult problems between himself and his parents, and the behavior is also going to hurt his schoolwork and his future.

The student can help himself by talking with friends about his problems at home. He will realize that he is not alone. Many teens have overly-strict parents and must learn to live with and cope with the situation. The student can also talk with his counselor at school or a teacher or social worker about ways of coping with his home life. Truancy is not a helpful or positive route to take in trying to get back at strict parents, and truancy actually hurts the student more than the parents.

Just as there are all types of students, there are also all types of parents. Some parents intentionally keep their children home from school in order to take care of family business. If the mother is working and a small child that needs to be taken care of is at home, the adolescent student may often have to miss class sessions or whole days of school in order to babysit. Sometimes parents also have their son or daughter run errands such as picking Uncle Burt up at the airport or taking Grandma to the dentist. Most adolescents regard these types of absences as legitimate since they have their parents' approval. However, the more school a student misses the less chance he has for success in his classes. It cannot benefit a child to be out of school when he should be in a classroom learning and trying to improve himself.

Parents are also sometimes responsible for a student's truancy when they call the school or send a note to school to excuse her when there's really no legitimate reason for her absence. Some parents do this either because they feel they're helping their child out or are doing her a favor. Others are so afraid of the fights that will ensue with their children that they simply excuse their child to avoid hassles. One must consider the values of parents and students in cases like this. How important is school? If a student is enrolled in school to improve herself and to get an education, she can only do it by attending classes regularly. The more her parents call in to excuse her, the more school she is going to miss in the future because this practice of fake excuses will soon become a habit. A student should not feel comfortable about putting her parents in a position in which they have to lie to school officials in order that she may have some time off from classes.

Whereas parents may sometimes be at fault for a student's truant absence, there are also times when the school may be indirectly responsible for the student's cutting. In some cases, such as Holly's, the student may be given a schedule which makes it very easy for the student to cut classes. One of the most common reasons students give for skipping class is that it's boring. In some cases this may be a legitimate excuse. Some students may be placed in a course which is too easy for them. If they are bored for that reason, they should see their counselor to get a class changed or arrange some independent study assignments with the teacher for extra credit or enrichment. This will at least make the class more interesting, and if the student is interested in his education, it will also make the class more challenging.

In some cases a student is bored with a class because it is too hard. If the student cannot understand or follow what is going on in class, he is, of course, going to be bored and may very well have a tendency to skip class. Rather than opting for truancy, the student should attack his problem positively. He should, of course seek after-school help from his teacher. He also may want the aid of a tutor either in school or out of school. His counselor will be able to help him find a tutor. If it's possible for the student to change to a lower level class, and the counselor thinks a change is warranted, then this is also a positive solution to the problem.

A student may also have a tendency to skip class because of what the student considers poor teaching. If, indeed, a student feels a teacher is doing a bad job, he should talk with her counselor about the situation. A class change may be possible, but more than likely the student is going to have to adjust herself to the teacher's style and simply cope as well as possible. Everyone in school, whether it's grade school, high school, or college gets stuck with a poor teacher or a boring teacher once in a while. The student must realize that school is not intended to be entertaining and that not every teacher can interest students. In cases such as this, the student should consider the importance of the course to her development and progress in school. She should simply report to class every day, do what the teacher requires, and get something positive out of the experience. Ditching the class may provide temporary relief, but the student will fall behind in her work. She then will not only be bored but will be bored and failing. It would be too bad if the student were to fail the class and have to repeat it. It would be even worse if the student had to repeat the course with the same teacher. Better to pass the course, get it over with, and move on to a course which may be better taught and more interesting.

Because of a personality conflict or a disagreement or a fight with a teacher, a student may not want to attend class. The student must keep in mind what she can lose by not attending class and work to straighten out her problem with the teacher as soon as possible. If a frank discussion with the teacher after class does not help, the student should discuss her problem with a counselor, social worker, or school administrator.

Although some student truancy may be a direct or indirect fault of the parent or the school, most truancy is the fault of the student alone. There are probably as many reasons for a student's truancy as there are truant students. The most obvious and probably the most popular reason for a student to miss a class is for socializing with friends. Students gather outside today's high schools to chat and smoke, and they often consider this socialization to be more important than their education. Many times the students will not return to classes but simply remain outside the school to continue their activities. Students also leave campus to go out to breakfast or for other adventures. They drive to town, order breakfast, and stay at the restaurant to enjoy their food and conversation until they are ready to return to school—regardless of how many classes they miss. Students also joy-ride during school hours. Some even spend the whole day riding around town and visiting parks and forest preserves or hanging out at a friend's house.

Generally, what these students are doing is reverting to their childhood—their early childhood. When a person is four-years-old, he has no responsibilities other than to play, have fun, and enjoy being a child. Once that person enters school, his responsibilities begin to change. From first grade on, that child is accepting more and more responsibility and spending more and more time on school work. For most teenagers their only responsibility is to attend school and do the required work in order to prepare themselves for the time when they will be responsible for supporting themselves and conducting their own lives. School, at this point in their lives, is their job. Students who are truant from school in order to socialize are returning to the age of four when they had nothing to do but play. A teenager should be responsible enough, whether he is thirteen or eighteen, to attend a full day of school on a regular basis and do the work required of him. Parents and school officials who see children continuing to be truant from school become frustrated and angry because they know that the students are hurting themselves in the missed schoolwork, the lowered grades, and the lost credit. Frustration and anger occur, too, because of the hard work teachers undertake in preparing lessons and teaching classes and giving extra help. Teachers then see that certain students do not care enough about themselves or the efforts of others working on their behalf to even show up for class. Parents, too, often make a great deal of effort in trying to help their children attend school and do well, only to see their efforts frustrated by the continued truancy or misconduct of their children. Parents and teachers have to work hard every day to support themselves and their families. They have no choice but to report to work and do their jobs. If a student's schooling were treated as a job just as his parents or teachers, the truant student would not last very long but would quickly be fired for irregular attendance.

The efforts of teachers and parents to help students attend school regularly are efforts taken because teachers and parents care about teenagers. They don't want them to grow up to be irresponsible—they want to help them grow up and be able to manage their own lives successfully and responsibly. If a student demonstrates through continued truancy that she

cannot responsibly run her own life, then she is, in a sense, inviting adults to interfere even more in her life, and through punishment and restrictions try to control her life to a degree which will not enable her to live it irresponsibly. In most cases, the more irresponsible a student is, the more restrictions she places on herself through adult intervention and control. If, indeed, the truant teenager wants more freedom and responsibility in her life, she should abide by the school regulations, demonstrate to her parents and to school officials that she can responsibly run her own life, and thusly receive more freedom in return.

Oftentimes, however, the teenager is more interested in proving himself to his friends or pleasing his friends than he is in pleasing his parents or teachers. If a number of students are going out to lunch rather than attending class, those truant students believe they must prove to each other that they are *adult* enough to choose for themselves what they do with their time. If they don't go along with the crowd, they feel they won't belong. They'll be *different*. If a student feels that he would rather be like his truant friends than attend a class he knows he should attend, then that student should do some serious thinking about where he's going. Why is he in school in the first place? Is it primarily to have a good time and to please friends, or is it to help himself to grow and improve through education? Certainly everyone wants to be a part of a crowd and belong, but one is a weak individual indeed if he goes against his own beliefs simply for the sake of being part of the crowd.

Certainly, it is hard for one to go against the crowd, but the best solution to the problem is not to give in to something you know is wrong. One should stand on his own, and stick up for his beliefs. It's difficult but it's the only way one will receive the respect of others and of oneself. It doesn't take courage to conform to someone else's rules, but it does take courage to hold firm to your own beliefs.

Other Serious Impediments to School Attendance

Student Attitudes: Some students hold the attitude that certain classes (particularly P.E. class and study hall) are a waste of their time. Students in this category usually place a low value on education. Their attitude will not change until they can understand the importance of these classes. Talking with teachers, administrators, or counselors in their building will help them understand. Also the classes will be a waste of time for the student only if she makes it so. Some students show up at P.E. class but don't dress and don't participate. Yes, that is a waste, of time. Study hall should be planned for so that it isn't a waste of time. Essentially it's a free period. One can plan on doing the same thing there every day, such as math homework, or one can do whatever homework needs to be done. One can also make the experience more enjoyable by reading books, magazines, or newspapers or by working crossword puzzles or other word games. There also is usually a teacher on duty in study hall. Ask that teacher for homework help. Above all, make the experience profitable!

Socialization: Many students miss class simply to hang with friends. There are many chances for students to get together or chat outside of school. A student simply has to decide what's important in a case such as this.

Failure to do Homework: Some students don't go to class because they didn't do the homework and are afraid of embarrassment in the class for not having it done. Students have to become conscientious in doing their homework every day. If there isn't enough time for one to do all the required homework, a student should ask for tutorial help or help from his parents. Also the student should talk with the counselor about ways of organizing and studying more efficiently. The school librarian can also help in finding magazine articles, pamphlets and books on how to study effectively. The important thing in doing homework is to plan ahead and finish it before the next school day. If homework is not completed, demonstrate the courage to attend class, explain the situation to the teacher, and complete and submit the missed homework as soon as possible.

Peer Pressure: Many students do what their friends do in order to please their friends. If one has to ditch classes in order to belong to a group, one should, perhaps, find a new group. One should be able to find friends to hang with during the school day who do attend classes. Also a student might consider the fact that people respect others because they stand up for their beliefs. If a student ditches class and feels guilty about it but feels he may be pleasing his friends, he is not earning their respect. He could be a stronger person, attend classes, and hang with his friends after school. If his friends do respect him, they might even follow him to class.

Job: Some students consider a job more important than attending classes. They often leave school early to get to work on time and sometimes even work while they should be in school. Not only is the student breaking the state law on school attendance, but the employer is breaking the law by employing a student while he should be attending school. Some students work so late at night that they can't get up the following morning to attend school. In both cases the working student should talk with his employer in order to arrange a schedule that won't conflict with school. Perhaps shorter hours or a more reasonable schedule would help.

Bullying: Teens can be cruel. They can tease and taunt other students for any number of reasons. Students who are teased in a class may not want to attend regularly, and for good reason. No student should have to suffer abuse at school, and the quicker a student seeks help in these situations, the better. The student should seek help from his teacher, counselor, dean or other school administrator. These people are trained to deal with bullying, and they can be successful in correcting the situation. The student should not be afraid of bullying and run away but should be courageous and attack the problem constructively. Understand that there is something wrong with the bully—not with you.

Status Seeker: Some students who may subconsciously consider themselves unimportant, or even worthless, may seek status among their peers by playing the role of the hard guy or tough dude who mocks authority. By walking the halls during classes, hanging

around outside the school and bragging about his truancy, this type of student sees himself as important among his friends and maybe even somewhat of a hero. He's fooling himself, however. Most people, even his friends, really have very little respect for this type of student and, in fact, probably think him to be foolish. The student could very likely be expelled from school, as many of these types of students are. He won't appreciate school until the day he is told that he can't come anymore—that he can't even step on the school campus.

Fear of Failure: Failure in a class is never something to be proud of and is never a pleasant experience. Some students are afraid to admit that they can't handle the work in a class. They feel they are going to fail a class, and rather than seek help or face the embarrassment of academic failure, they truant the class. When they then fail the class, they can brag to their friends that they failed only because they didn't attend. They could have passed the class easily, but the teacher bored them or they were wasting their time. This student feels he's coming across as a big man to his friends. To himself, however, he's afraid. He's afraid because he knows he's actually a weak person, running away from a difficult problem. Many teachers grade on effort. If this student were in class every day working to the best of his ability and, perhaps, seeking help after school, he would almost certainly pass. There would then be no reason at all for this student to fear failure.

Fear of Work: Some students simply do not like to work. It's too hard. It takes effort. It's much easier to do nothing than to do something. This type of student is getting nowhere in school, and, if she doesn't change something about her habits and attitudes, she will get nowhere in life. She will more than likely be unsuccessful and unhappy. If she is too lazy to help herself, others such as parents and school administrators will put increasingly more pressure on the student to produce some work and make an effort at success in school. A lot of heartache will result on the part of the parents and the student because of the fights and arguments that will result from this pressure. The unpleasantness and continued hassles could be avoided by a minimum of effort in the classroom.

Smoking: Some students are so hooked on smoking that they feel that they have to leave the building for a quick cigarette between classes. Unfortunately, the quick cigarette usually lasts longer than planned, and the student is either late to class or truant from class. Little can be done for this student unless he quits smoking, at least during school hours. No one, however, quits smoking unless they really want to. Most teenagers, once they've started smoking have no desire to stop. They don't feel the harmful and painful physical effects of smoking because they are young, and smoking serves an important social function among friends. It makes them feel a part of the crowd. If a student wants to quit smoking, help is available from health teachers, counselors, school nurses, and librarians. When a habit such as smoking interferes with the productive aspects of a person's life, something should indeed be changed.

Emotional Problems: Because of the pressures of life, some people develop emotional problems which are responsible for their behaving differently than they usually do.

Everyone has problems and pressures, and sometimes these problems become too much for one to handle. The person may experience a breakdown or a change of personality or a change of emotional character. In cases such as this, the individual can usually not help himself. He needs to talk for an extended period of time with a professional—a social worker, psychologist, therapist, or counselor. Usually people suffering from emotional problems will not seek help on their own. It is up to someone else to recognize that the person has a problem and try to coax them to get help. The only thing the student can do is to take the advice of concerned adults and cooperate in talking with a counselor or therapist.

Illness: Illness is often responsible for truancy. Sometimes a student will be at home for a long period of time with a legitimate illness. Anyone out of school for a long time for any reason has a very hard time returning to school and readjusting. Some students have been out of school so much for illness that they have gotten into the habit of being out of school. They are uncomfortable in school and overwhelmed by the amount of make-up work they face. It becomes easier to stay at home than to attend school. In extreme cases some students develop “school phobia” during long illnesses. This is a fear of school. The student is actually afraid to step into the school building. Some of these students never return to school. In cases like this it is important for the student (with the help of a school counselor or social worker) to simply get back into the school and once again develop the habit of going to classes and attending regularly. The habit of going to classes has to become stronger than the habit of staying at home.

Other students stay at home because of psychosomatic illnesses which are physical disorders brought on by emotional processes. Many times students will have cramps, upset stomachs, headaches, backaches, dizziness, nausea and other symptoms which keep them home from school. Many times the student with psychosomatic illnesses will miraculously recover enough by the time school is out to participate in an after-school activity or go out with friends. Oftentimes too, they will again be ill on the following morning. Any student whose attendance follows this pattern or who misses a lot of school due to illness should certainly see a doctor. If there is no physical cause for the ailments, the problem lies in the student’s mind and should be addressed by working with a social worker or therapist.

Learning Disabilities: Some students are truant from classes because they can’t do the work. They can’t do the work because of a problem they can’t help. They can get help, though, and correct the problem. Learning disabilities are physical or emotional problems which make it very difficult for a student to learn. She rarely knows that she has a disability, and these problems must be diagnosed by teachers or other school personnel or doctors. Learning disabilities can be addressed, and once a disability is diagnosed, the student should take the advice of the people helping her and do what they advise.

Language Differences: Some students may be foreign-born and still learning to speak the English language. Learning is doubly difficult for these students, and it becomes easy to run away and skip classes rather than to face the difficult problem of learn-

ing a new language. These students should talk over the problem with their teachers and work cooperatively with them. Ask for extra help. Teachers will be willing to give students having problems any help they possibly can. English tutors are available. The student should see a counselor to line up a tutor for help.

Don't let truancy ruin your education, your relationships, and your future. Everyone has problems and difficulties in life, but truancy only makes everything worse. Show some strength and courage, address your responsibilities at school, and ensure a successful future for yourself.