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# VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH LEGISLATIVE STUDIES

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## Education Reports

The Commission on Youth has prepared six reports that treat some aspect of the truancy and delinquency prevention spectrum. The reports are listed below and may be accessed on the Commission's website: <http://coy.state.va.us> (click Reports).

- ❖ Interim Report of the Virginia Commission on Youth - Study of Alternative Education Options—Report Document 194 (2008)
- ❖ Guide to Local Alternative Education Options for Suspended and Expelled Students in the Commonwealth—Report Document 144 (2008)
- ❖ Student Discipline Statutes—House Document 32 (2001)
- ❖ Truants and Runaways—House Document 57 (1999)
- ❖ Truants and Runaways—House Document 64 (1998)
- ❖ Educational Needs of Homeless Children—House Document 52 (1998)

In addition, the Commission has prepared a PowerPoint slide presentation on Truancy and Dropout Prevention (June 2008). Parts of the slide presentation, also accessible from the Commission's website, are included in this briefing report.

Other recent truancy and school dropout studies were a product of SJR 329 (Locke, 2007) which requested that the Board of Education (BOE) study high school dropout and graduation rates in the Commonwealth. HB 19 (Fralin, 2006) required that the BOE collect, analyze and report high school graduation and dropout data using a formula prescribed by BOE. The formula that was selected by the BOE is recommended by the National Governors Association Task Force on State High School Graduation. HJR 130 (Hall, 2006) encourages

the Department of Education (DOE) to monitor and collect data and information on the State’s high school dropout and graduation rates.

### **Virginia’s Truancy Laws**

- ❖ In Virginia, the law does not specifically define a truant but does define a child who is habitually and without justification absent from school as a "child in need of supervision" when certain other conditions are met.
- ❖ DOE is using a proxy measure to report truancy: the number of students with whom a conference was scheduled after the student had accumulated six absences during the school year, in accordance with §22.1-258, *Code of Virginia*.

<b>Virginia Law by Section Number Related to Truancy</b>	
<b>§22.1-254</b>	<b>Compulsory Attendance Laws</b>
<b>§22.1-258</b>	<b>Appointment of Attendance Officers</b>
<b>§22.1-259</b>	<b>Teachers to Keep Daily Attendance Records</b>
<b>§22.1-260</b>	<b>Reports of Children Enrolled and Nonenrolled</b>
<b>§22.1-261</b>	<b>Duties of Attendance Officers</b>
<b>§22.1-262</b>	<b>Complaints to Court When Parents Fail to Comply</b>
<b>§22.1-263</b>	<b>Violations Constitute Misdemeanor</b>
<b>§22.1-265</b>	<b>Inducing Children to Absent Themselves</b>
<b>§22.1-266</b>	<b>Law Enforcement Officers and Truant Children</b>
<b>§22.1-267</b>	<b>Proceedings Against Habitually Absent Children</b>
<b>§22.1-269</b>	<b>Duties of the Board of Education</b>
<b>§22.1-279.3</b>	<b>Parental Responsibility and Involvement Requirements</b>
<b>§16.1-241.2</b>	<b>Proceedings Against Certain Parents</b>

- ❖ §22.1-258 of the *Code of Virginia* addresses the responsibilities of the student, parent and school employees with respect to attendance, identification procedures and the provision of services as well as the imposition of sanctions in the event of noncompliance.

The primary element of §22.1-258 with respect to identification is that an “unexcused absence” is defined as one in which the parents are unaware and non-supportive of their child’s nonattendance.

## Truancy and Related Terminology

The Terminology used in referring to children and youth who do not attend school regularly (Source: Virginia Department of Education, *Improving School Attendance, A Research Guide for Virginia Schools*, 2005.)

Truants	Defendant
Status Offenders	Member of an Assistant Unit
Children in Need of Supervision	Student, minor, child or juvenile

### Issues Related to Truancy

- **Chronic truancy and school dropout rates continue to be critical problems nationally and in the Commonwealth.**
- **In certain areas of the Commonwealth, dropout rates exceed the annual state and national dropout rates.**
- **Truancy affects students of all ages, communities, backgrounds and school divisions.**
- **Data reveal that a disproportionate number of poor, urban and minority youth drop out of school each year, and that factors associated with school dropout are also linked to chronic truancy.**
- **Unexcused absences from school are linked to numerous harmful social and personal consequences, among them are:**
  - **Academic failure, school dropout rates, crime and violence, unemployment, substance abuse, adult criminality and incarceration, unwanted pregnancy and social isolation.**
- **The gap between dropouts and high school graduates is widening as opportunities are increasing for higher skilled workers and are disappearing for the less skilled.**
- **Declining graduation rates threaten Virginia's economic stability to maintain a competitive advantage among industrialized nations.**

## **Recent Commission Activities Pertaining to Truancy and Dropout Prevention:**

### **Youth Roundtables**

- The Virginia Commission on Youth conducted youth roundtables throughout Virginia in partnership with the Virginia Boys and Girls Clubs.
- Over 70 students participated
- Over 20 youth-related community leaders were present, including:
  - State Senators, Delegates, School Superintendents, Ministers, Police Officers, Youth Leaders, Local Officials and Local Service Providers.

### **Site Visits**

The Virginia Commission on Youth scheduled site visits with local schools, school superintendents, departments of social services, court services units, J&DR judges, law enforcement and community organizations.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
Danville	May 20, 2008
Hampton	May 27, 2008
Manassas	June 4, 2008
Norfolk	June 5, 2008
Richmond	TBA
Petersburg	TBA
Roanoke	TBA

### **Roundtable Questions**

- What are some of the positive aspects of growing up in your area?
- Why do you think it is important to graduate from high school?

- What do you believe is the reason that some of your classmates skip school – don't attend school or drop out of school?
- What are some of the challenges that you face as teenagers that make completing school difficult?
- What could the school system or the community do to encourage students to graduate from high school?
- What do students need to succeed?

### **Youth-Identified Factors Leading to Truancy and Dropping Out of School**

- Lack of motivation
- Family problems at home
- Gang violence
- Drug abuse
- Bullying
- Negative peer pressure
- Teenage pregnancy
- Stress and anxiety
- Boredom

### **Youth-Identified Obstacles to Staying in School**

- Support from family
- Peer pressure
- Lack of empathy from school administrators
- Lack of additional teacher support (tests, personal)
- Culture
- Parent's denial of student behavior
- Overcoming low self-esteem

### **Youth-Identified Resources that Help Keep Kids in School**

- After school activities and centers
- Older teenagers as mentors
- Positive community leaders
- Youth counselors

- Family court (in some states)
- Imposing mandatory GPAs to participate in sports

### **Youth-Identified Steps to Curb Truancy and School Dropout**

- Anonymous peer counselors
- Additional tutoring for standardized tests
- Programs to improve low self-esteem
- Change the image of attending school
- After school jobs
- Additional information on trade schools and careers
- Teacher training
- Improved school security
- Stiffer penalties for chronic truants (family court)

### **Commission on Youth Site Visits**

- Site visit interviews scheduled with local school division representatives, school superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, attendance officers, J&D judges, court service unit officials, social service officials and sheriffs.
- **Site visits to date:**
  - Hampton City
  - Manassas/Prince William
  - Lee County - completed
  - Roanoke City
- **Initial Findings from Site Visits**
  - Issues confronting school divisions impacting truancy/dropout rates are varied.
  - Prescription drug abuse
  - Teen pregnancy
  - Substance abuse
  - Factory work/hours impact families' ability to respond to truancy

- Transient population
- Generational issue
- Diverse student body within school divisions
- Assortment of school division policies and procedures pertaining to truancy
- Some school divisions utilize Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court whereas others do not.
- Several localities have truancy courts.
- Collaboration with law enforcement is crucial.
- Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) referrals typically utilized only for Special Education students.
- Some school divisions had a more comprehensive approach encompassing both prevention and intervention practices.
- Lack of leadership/collaboration
- Alternative schools are being used with success.

The Virginia Department of Education's Dropout Prevention Project Leadership Committee had its first meeting on June 24, 2008 during which the dropout issue was defined, the cost of dropouts (educational, social and economic) was discussed along with contributing factors and prevention measures. A second meeting was held September 23, 2008. **VDOE will host the *first statewide summit on dropout prevention in Richmond, VA on October 28, 2008.***

## **ABSTRACTS OF SELECTED RESEARCH ON TRUANTS AND DROPUTS**

## **Introduction**

This section presents brief summaries of published research that focuses on truancy and dropouts. We have organized these summaries by level of education that they address with the first being preschool and early education, followed by elementary school, middle school and high school. They are further divided by focus on the family, individual, school or community. In a few cases, a study is mentioned more than once when the researchers' work addresses more than one level, or issue.

### **Research that Focuses on Preschool/ Early Childhood Education**

A 2000 report by Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson examined longitudinal data on children's academic experiences from birth through age 19. One of their key findings was that dropping out of high school is a process and not a one-time event. The authors noted that race, socioeconomic status, and gender are significant predictors of HS drop out (specifically, Black, poor, male are at greater risk). However, this study also established the importance of early childhood experiences as being influential for later dropout risk, suggesting that dropout prevention must begin before children enter school.

Currie (2001) analyzed several randomized studies regarding Head Start programs and their effects on children's later performance in school. Head Start was shown to have short term effects on school-readiness and performance, but results were mixed about its long term impacts. The studies reviewed did demonstrate a decrease in grade retention, however, which has been correlated to future dropout. Head Start was also shown to be effective in improving educational outcomes for children from "disadvantaged" backgrounds, which is also related to higher dropout rates.

Temple, Reynolds and Miedel (2000) examined the impact of 20 sites of a community-based early education program in Chicago had on subsequent high school dropout rates. The authors found that for children who had participated in the program prior to starting school, there was a 24% reduction in school dropout. Similarly, those youth that participated for longer times (until third grade in some instances) were found to be 27% less likely to drop out of school, when compared to those who stopped before kindergarten.

In a related study, Reynolds, Temple, Robertson and Mann (2001) found that children who participated in community based early childhood interventions

had higher graduation rates, lower arrest rates and lower dropout rates when compared to children who did not participate in such programs. Additionally, the children that participated in the preschool interventions were less likely to be retained in any grade, and less likely to be referred to special education. Both of these factors have been associated with increased dropout rates.

### **Studies that identify individual and family factors associated with the relationship between preschool programs and school dropout:**

Hammond, Linton, Smink, and Drew (2007) reported a number of family-related factors that impact the likelihood that a student drops out of school. These family dynamics may be singularly influential, or occur all together. Although these factors are being mentioned with the early childhood section, they often persist throughout high school. Consistent with other research, low socioeconomic status remains a key predictor of academic problems for children. Other concerns raised by Hammond, et al include frequent moves (resulting in high mobility and school transfers); parent's education level, and perceived value of education; large families, including other family members who have dropped out of school (parent or sibling); out of home placements ,such as foster care or kinship care, and the family's engagement with the school system.

The Hammond, et al study (2007) also identified individual (student) characteristics that are correlated with an increased risk of dropping out of school. Similarly, these issues also may be present across the academic life of a student, some manifesting as early as preschool, or in some instances, not appearing until high school. Specific individual characteristics include learning disabilities, negative attitudes and values regarding school, poor attendance, a lack of engagement in school activities, subpar academic performance, and home responsibilities such as a pregnancy, working, or an assumed caregiver role.

### **Research that Focuses on Children in Elementary School**

In one of the earliest studies in this area, Simner and Barnes (1991) found that children who were unable to master first-grade reading and mathematics were more likely to drop out of high school, or have significant academic problems than students who performed better in the 1st grade.

Subsequently, a longitudinal study about the antecedents to school dropout that followed a cohort of first grade students over 14 years, Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997) identified factors of the first grade students that may predict late high school dropout. They divided these characteristics into two categories: “personal resources” and school resources. The personal resources such as behaviors and attitudes could be either a risk or protective factor, but remained influential to the student’s progress over the course of the study. School experiences include grades, test scores and being “tracked,” and are similarly risk or protective factors. The authors suggest treating dropout prevention as a “life course” process.

Alexander et al (1997) also were able to show that family factors, including parents’ attitudes and behaviors about school, family stressors, and parents’ own socialization habits had a greater impact than other previously identified “risk factors” for school dropout such as socioeconomic status, or family composition.

### **Research that Focuses on Children in Middle School**

In a study of truancy among 8th and 10th graders, Henry (2007) identified several key predictors of truant behavior, including parent’s education, and a lack of supervision by parents or a responsible adult. Henry (2007) also noted that student variables such as low grades, low aspirations and general disengagement from school led to truancy for the students in his sample. Truancy has been linked to subsequent school dropout.

Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007) also noted that detachment from school frequently begins in the middle school years. High absenteeism (usually truant behaviors), academic failure, and other behavioral problems can often predict the beginning of the disengagement from school.

In the Henry study (2007), as middle school students begin to disengage from school through truant behaviors, they often become involved with substance use and other delinquent behaviors with their peers. These behaviors often accelerate the dropping out process.

### **Research that Focuses on High School Youth**

In an early study of this age group, Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that the family-level concerns addressed in the early childhood and elementary school years typically carry over to the middle and high school years. Of particular

importance in their study, however, was a finding that high mobility (frequent moving) for high school students doubles their risk of dropping out, when compared to students who have not moved.

In one of the most recently published longitudinal studies, the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study-PELS, Nield, Stoner-Eby and Furstenberg (2008) reported on a cohort of ninth-grade students that was followed over four years. A key finding of this study was that the transition to high school (usually 9th grade) was pivotal in influencing the decision to drop out. The author's recommended that schools place more emphasis on this transitional period to reduce dropouts.

Hammond, et al (2007) reported findings similar to the above, and while they noted that the dropout process begins early in one's academic career, they identified specific student-level predictors of dropping out that manifest during the high school years. These included pregnancy or becoming a father, financial need to work and other home responsibilities. However, academic and behavioral performances remained influential on the decision to drop out.

Henry and Huizinga (2007) found that academic performance and friendship with delinquent peers were strong predictors of truancy, but doing well academically could mitigate the effects of delinquent peers.

Stearns and Glennie (2006) found that one of the reasons that high school students dropped out of high school was for family responsibilities, which was often the result of a teen pregnancy, or to care for another family member already in the home. These responsibilities may also lead the student to choose employment over school.

In the Stearns and Glennie's (2006) study of teen dropouts, the authors found that while teens leave school for varied reasons (most often poor academic progress, discipline or to work), the highest dropout rate was found among 9th grade students.

Bridgeland, DiIulio and Morison (2006) interviewed adolescents and young adults (16-25) from various parts of the country who dropped out of high school. The authors found that while there was not consensus as to why students dropped out, two oft cited reasons included poor academic performance, and concerns about meeting new testing standards. Most students who dropped out admitted to later regretting that decision.

Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies on high school dropout. Each of the studies showed an association with grade retention and subsequent dropout, and in several studies, retention was found to be the strongest predictor of high school dropout.

Rumberger and Larson (1998) also noted that changing schools was often a function of the student's discipline problems. Suspensions and expulsions, along with truancy and other misbehavior were found to be strong predictors of high school dropout.

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