

TRUANCY: WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE CAN DO

It is estimated that one in ten secondary school students in San Diego County miss 10 percent of school without a valid excuse each year¹. This statistic raises a red flag because the more days a youth misses school, the farther s/he falls behind in skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex world. Besides losing academic traction, it is well documented that excessive absenteeism from school (missing 10% or more school days) and truancy (three unexcused absences in a school year²) are associated with committing crime and substance use³. For example, data from SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program show that 90 percent of juvenile arrestees interviewed in Juvenile Hall in 2010 said they had been truant in the past month, and of these truants, 26 percent said they missed school because of drug and/or alcohol use in the last year⁴. Table 1 summarizes why a pattern of truancy should be identified and addressed quickly and highlights things all parents should know.

Table 1
FAST FACTS ABOUT TRUANCY

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TRUANCY	WHAT PARENTS CAN DO IF A CHILD IS TRUANT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Chronic truants are 12 times more likely than non-truants to have ever committed a serious assault³.- Research suggests a strong relationship between truancy and drug use, most likely because of the time truants spend with peers unsupervised by an adult³.- Truants are less prepared for the workforce and place a greater burden on social services and criminal justice system, both of which are funded by public tax dollars³.- Schools risk losing a portion of federal and state education funding when students are not in school³.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Understand the reasons why school attendance is important to promoting a more successful life for your child.- Talk to your child and emphasize that school is mandatory, not a choice- If you need help with making sure your child attends school, ask the school for information about truancy prevention services.

Over the years, local leaders have made truancy prevention and intervention a priority, with an emphasis on identifying patterns of truant behavior early on so that the child and parent can be referred to services focused on increasing school attendance and minimizing poor life choices. To learn more about truancy law and prevention efforts, visit www.sdcourt.ca.gov or www.sdcoe.net.

¹ The Children's Initiative (2009). *San Diego County Report Card on Children and Families*. Retrieved February 10, 2012, from http://www.thechildrensinitiative.org/pdfs/report_card/CI_ReportCard_2009_final_web.pdf

² California Department of Education. Retrieved [January 26, 2012] from www.cde.ca.gov.

³ Yeide, M. & Kobrin, M. (2009). **Truancy Literature Review**. Washington D.C. OJJDP USDOJ. Retrieved February 10, 2012, from <http://www2.dsonline.com/dso/Truancy%20Literature%20Review.pdf>

⁴ Burke, C. (2011). **2010 Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region Aggregate Data**. SANDAG. Retrieved February 10, 2012, from www.sandag.org/cjc.