



## **Truancy: Costs and Benefits**

### **EXTENT OF THE TRUANCY PROBLEM:**

- ❖ While there is not an abundance of national truancy data, some metropolitan areas report thousands of unexcused absences each day.

DeKalb, Jay, "Student Truancy," ERIC Digest 125, April 1999.

### **STATE OF THE RESEARCH:**

- ❖ Very little research has been done to evaluate either the costs or the monetary benefits of reducing truancy. The research that does exist suggests that truancy reduction programs are very inexpensive relative to the cost of high school dropout.
- ❖ The costs of truancy can be categorized in terms of:
  - a) the cost of efforts to correct the problem – school efforts, court efforts including sanctions, and the broad range of truancy reduction programs;
  - b) its contribution to high school failure and the well-documented cost of failure to both society and the dropout;
  - c) its contribution to the cost of juvenile crime to both victim and law enforcement, particularly of those crimes committed during school hours; and
  - d) its role as an early step on a path that, for some individuals, leads to adult criminality.

### **WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE COST TO SOCIETY:**

- ❖ We have no hard data on the likelihood of truant students to drop out of high school in the absence of intensive intervention. However, truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out.

Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., Thornberry, T. P. & Cothorn, L. (2000, November). Co-occurrence of delinquency and other problem behaviors. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP.

Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., & Thornberry, T. P. (1994, March). *Urban delinquency and substance abuse: Initial findings*, OJJDP.

Morris, J. D., Ehren, B. J., & Lenz, B. K. (1991). Building a model to predict which fourth through eighth graders will drop out in high school. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 59(3), 286-292.





- ❖ 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 \$800,000 over the course of his or her lifetime. Discounted for the current value of the money, the cost is over \$200,000.

Vernez, Georges, Richard A. Krop, and C. Peter Rydell, Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs, RAND MR-1036-EDU, 1999.

- ❖ A study of the costs and benefits of three truancy reduction programs and three truancy courts operating in Colorado yielded the following results:
  - a) Since one high school dropout costs \$200,000 in current dollars, the truancy programs operating in Adams County and Denver, each of which cost about \$50,000 a year, can each operate for four years for the same cost as one high school dropout. These programs serve about 85 students a year.
  - b) Therefore, even if those programs only encourage one out of 300 program participants to graduate from high school, they will yield a positive return on their investment.
  - c) The more comprehensive Pueblo program, called Project Respect, must encourage 1 of 115 participants to graduate.
  - d) The truancy courts break even in terms of their costs and benefits of operation if they encourage one of 500 petitioned truants in Adams County to graduate, one of 740 in Denver, and one of 290 in Pueblo.
  - e) No outcome data were available, but given their low cost of operation, and the high cost of dropout, it is highly likely that all the truancy reduction programs and the courts pay for themselves many times over.

Heilbrunn, J. Z., "The Costs and Benefits of Three Intensive Interventions with Colorado Truants," *The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children*, 2003.

- ❖ After the police opened a truancy center in North Miami Beach and began picking up school aged youth on the street during school hours, crime diminished substantially in the targeted neighborhoods. For example, vehicle burglaries decreased by 22%, and residential burglaries criminal mischief both decreased by 19%.

Berger, W., and Susan Wind, "Police Eliminating Truancy: A PET Project," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Feb. 2000, p. 16-19.





- ❖ As of 1997, 41% of prison inmates, and 31% percent of probationers 18 years and older had not graduated from high school or earned a GED, compared with 18% of the general population.

Harlow, C. W., "Education and Correctional Populations," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, January 2003, NCJ 195670.

- ❖ According to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, there were 1,332 truants in juvenile detention in 1997, 913 in 1999, and 784 in 2001. The Census Bureau conducts this survey biannually for OJJDP, counting juveniles in detention nationwide on a single day in late October.

Sickmund, Melissa, "Juveniles in Corrections," Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report Series Bulletin, June 2004. And online data from the 2001 survey at [http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State\\_Offense.asp](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State_Offense.asp), 9/23/04.

### **COST TO THE INDIVIDUAL:**

- ❖ Data from the 2000 census show that high school dropouts had only a 52% employment rate in 1999, compared to 71% for high school graduates, and 83% for college graduates. Of those who worked full-time year-round in 1999, high school drop outs earned only 65% of the median earnings.

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1usboth.html/>

