



Responsibility for socialization

TRUANCY: More than absences

Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, PhD
James Taylor, MSW

© Copyright 2021

How to cite: Gentle-Genitty, C. & Taylor, J. (May, 2021). *Responsibility for socialization - Truancy: More than absences*. Pivot Attendance Solutions. DOI: 10.7912/vhe8-fd69.

Abstract

There is no shortage of schools with technology and personnel to take attendance. In sum, the only factor consistent across schools' data collection, is absences. Some differ by collecting only unexcused absences while others collect both excused and unexcused. Regardless of the formula used in the calculation of the total absences—before interventions or supports are offered—more than absences matter. Interventions must acknowledge truancy as a social problem with outsourced care. Responsibility shall be shared with systems, schools, students, society, and caregivers¹. Relying on legal statues alone is evidence of administrative deficiencies. Chasing only symptomatic and influencing factors like illness, lateness, poverty, transportation, ignorance, broken homes, and indifference to education reinforces the social nature of truancy. Truancy is a bundle of risk and protective factors, requiring attention to outsourced care. We know...

-
- Truancy is a social problem with outsourced care. It is symptomatic of other ecological factors.
 - Ecological factors are actions and interactions carried out via systems and sub-systems of one's life.
 - Factors, through theory of resilience lens, operate as risk or protective bundles or chains, rarely alone.
 - Isolating truancy to just “physical attendance” forces selective, biased, and in-complete interventions.
 - Recognizing truancy as a bundle necessitates action that is trauma-informed, holistic, and systematized.
-

TRUANCY

is ... “a student’s act of non-attendance evidenced by missing part or all of the school day without it being legitimately excused by school or per state law”.

In 2007 the primary researcher explored the topic using an invited presentation at the International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention (IATDP) in 2012. To complement the work, she used the one hour and a half presentation session to host a focus group on the topic of coining a common definition of truancy. Because the group was international in scope, in operation since 1911, hosting this particular focus group was ideal. Following the session, a draft definition of truancy resulted. As an additional step it was suggested that hosting

¹ Recognized as important pillars in attendance by Dr. Gentle-Genitty based on her research on outsourced care and truancy. It posits on the idea that even when multi-tiered responses are used to respond to students' school attendance behaviors, the response must engage the **systems, schools, students, society** and **caregivers**. *Outsourcing*, she defines, “is the way we meet our personal needs through choice.” As a society we believe we cannot be everything to ourselves unless we leverage collective knowledge, skills, and resources of others. Therefore, we outsource care. For instance, we outsource medical care to doctors and nurses; outsource punishment to law enforcement and legal entities; outsource health to farmers, grocery stores, gyms, nutritionists, and the like; we also outsource spirituality to churches and clergy; outsource social-emotional health to counselors, social workers, psychology/psychiatrists; caregiving to daycares; and education to school/ teachers and more.

of an online focus group could get the participation of the 250 active members registered on the Association’s list serve to give their input on the definition. A call went out to the entire list serve asking for feedback on the definition. The result was a 28-member online focus group composed of education workers, government officials, judges, and truancy expert stakeholders with multiple years of experience in educational settings. These persons agreed to take the draft definition and voluntarily coin a comprehensive definition of truancy. After the first round of suggestions was made, the data downloaded from all emails sent to the listserv were analyzed. Once completed the definition was cleaned up and amended as suggested by members and focus group members were asked to vote “yes” or “no” to the definition. There was 100% acceptance of the definition by all 28 persons. The resulting definition was:

Truancy is ... “a student’s act of non-attendance evidenced by missing part or all of the school day without it being legitimately excused by school or per state law”.

Some schools, based on their interventions and investments, place the blame for truancy on the child. They punish by suspensions, expulsions, removal from education, or removal from sports and co-curricular activities—a mixed message when the goal was to encourage that they stay in school. Alternatively, some states place the blame on the parents and institute laws and statues requiring that they pay a fine or be locked up. Yet, others blame the laws themselves and report their hands are tied. Blame is common, data boundless, responses many, success VERY LITTLE. These interventions have done very little to improve the situation. Schools have accepted the care outsourced to them but ONLY to educate not socialize. The quandary then is that parents have outsourced the care and education of their children to the schools and believe that socialization is part of their responsibility. Thus, the question is, if parents give responsibility for socialization and education to schools, and schools only accept part, whose role is it for socialization? Whose role is it to educate and socialize the child of the importance of setting a foundation for life through education and learning how to live well and live right beyond the classroom?

Pillars of Successful Truancy Outcomes

- **Systems:** The conglomerate of entities which govern schools: technology, policies, practices, personnel
- **Schools:** The structure as schooling: corporations, leadership, staff, curriculum, programs, partners
- **Students:** The wholeness of the identity as student: self, others, self-in relation to others, self to be
- **Society:** The totality of living in and in service to community, partners, social groups
- **Caregiver:** Entities responsible for care of the child and their view of themselves in-relation to others

Leveraging Next Steps

Leveraging next steps to action necessitates a closer understanding of what is the result of our practices and policies. A SWOT analysis is presented but in what we call “TWOS.” TWOS is a reversed analysis where you first examine the threats to the decision or outcome, examine the weaknesses in such a process, then define what opportunities can be leveraged and finally what strengths are available to capitalize on those opportunities to change the outcomes and threats.

Outsource has as much to do with the student as it does the caregiver. We live in a schooling dependent economic society. It means that the care of children, their wellbeing and education, is outsourced to an entity other than the parent for most of their waking hours in order to enable the caregiver to be a provider. Once this pattern is disrupted there is disequilibrium where both entities cannot find a socially sanctioned way for appropriate care. This is one reason juvenile justice or court-centered approaches became popular. There were no alternatives to education and care.

- Truancy is a social problem with outsourced care. It is symptomatic of other ecological factors.
- Ecological factors are actions and interactions carried out via systems and sub-systems of one’s life.
- Factors, through theory of resilience lens, operate as risk or protective bundles or chains, rarely alone.
- Isolating truancy to just “physical attendance” forces selective, biased, and in-complete interventions.
- Recognizing truancy as a bundle necessitates action that is trauma-informed, holistic, and systematized.

THREATS

- Who educates if not school?
- No place to learn
- Outside of parent view, who supervises child
- Lost generation
- Education lost

WEAKNESSES

- Systems are inadequate but available
- Definitions are incomplete but in use
- Staffing limited yet accessible
- Many persons examining issue but not targeted
- Legal options exist but punitive and late



OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage groups
- Maximize training
- Engage staffing
- Refine policies
- Set guardrails
- Seize resources

STRENGTHS

- Many exploring area now
- Attendance still matters
- Students still want to come to school
- Fiscal resources
- New technology and systems
- Better data and tracking

-
- **PLAN** For change to occur we must recognize our shared outsourced roles and responsibilities.
-

REFERENCES

Heyne, D., Gren-Landell, M., Melvin, G., & Gentle-Genitty, C. (2018). Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and How? Cognitive and Behavioral Practice.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.03.006>

Gentle-Genitty, C., Karikari, I, Chen, H., Wilka, E., & Kim, J. (2015). Truancy: a look at definitions in the USA and other territories. *Educational Studies*, 62-90.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.955734>