

STATE OF DELAWARE
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

**TRUANCY COURT
ANNUAL REPORT**
School Year 2003-2004

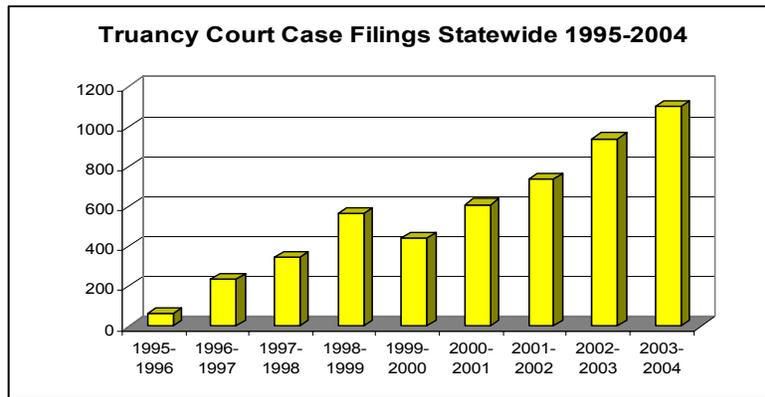


Delaware's statewide Truancy Court successfully combats truancy by pairing community health and social service resources with intensive court oversight to strengthen families, improve school attendance, and prevent juvenile delinquency.

What is the Truancy Court?

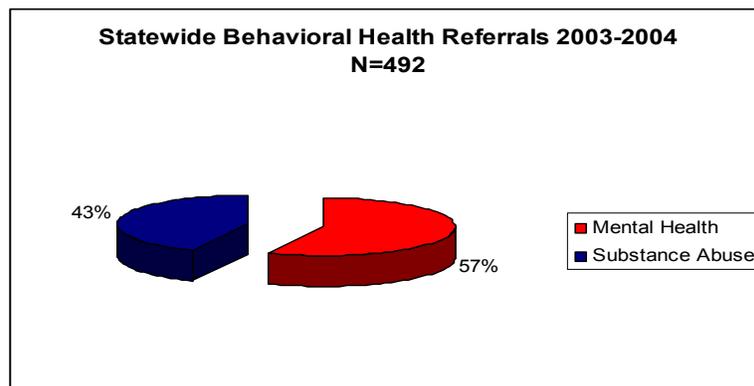
Truancy is a powerful predictor of juvenile delinquency and often reflects serious unresolved personal or family problems including homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, child abuse, or unmet educational needs. Delaware's Truancy Court takes a comprehensive approach to solving truancy problems in a family by involving visiting teachers, prosecutors, judges, court personnel, social workers, interns, and health, social service, and treatment providers. All serve an active role in assisting the family in solving its truancy and other problems and develop continuing relationships with the families during the six to nine month period that a family typically remains in Truancy Court.

In 2003-2004, the Truancy Court handled 1095 new cases encompassing 6551 court events (filings, arraignments, case reviews and dispositions) statewide. This represents a 15% caseload increase, and a 28% increase in court events, from last year, and increases of 49% in cases, and 90% in court events, in two years.



How does the Truancy Court work?

Truancy Court coordinates and collaborates with a variety of services, agencies and programs to provide a wraparound like service to our families. Interagency collaboration, established through the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Education, Department of Services for Children, Youth and Families, and the Justice of the Peace Court, and behavioral health treatment services have been major keys to the success of Truancy Court. It is well known that truancy is just a "symptom" of family and individual challenges. The Truancy Court Model provides for swift and highly personal intervention. Provider agencies are present in the courtroom to begin the process as soon as the court makes a referral. This immediate contact with providers -- resulting in a family leaving the court with a scheduled appointment -- has been significant in engaging a family in necessary services, such as treatment, parenting education, or family services. In 2003-2004, 492 Truancy Court cases, or 43% of the total cases, resulted in a substance abuse or mental health referral.



An additional intervention available in Truancy Court is on-site testing for substance abuse. For 2003-2004, 455 drug tests were administered based on high-risk indicators, with 50% of the evaluated parents and students testing positive for some type of drug. They were referred, along with parents and students who self-reported substance abuse, for assessment and treatment.

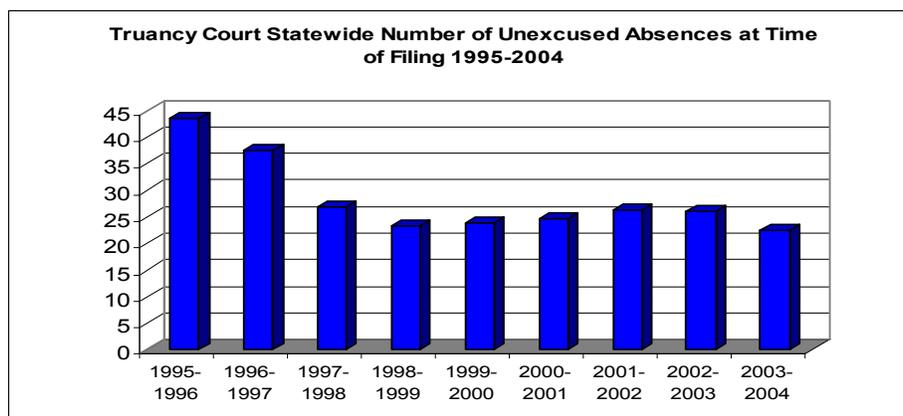
Truancy Court Report Card 2003-2004



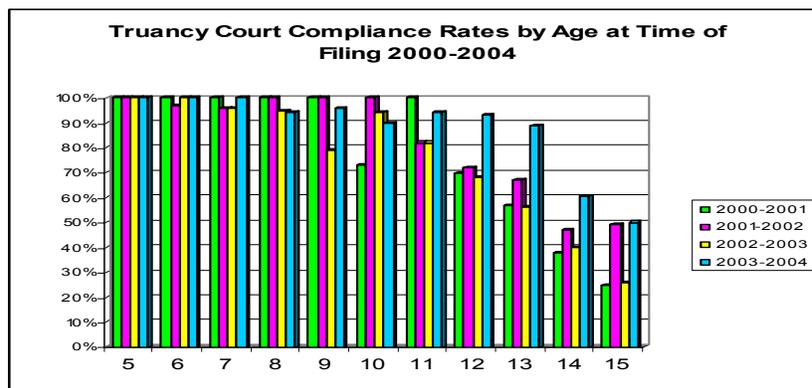
- ✓ **Dramatic increase in filings and court events** by 49% and 90%, respectively, since 2001-2002
- ✓ **Early intervention is key**
90-100% compliance rate if students are 12 years or less
Unexcused absences at filing dropped by 12% since last year-- a 50% reduction since beginning of Truancy Court
- ✓ **Success with direct accountability of teenagers**
Use of Failure to Attend School Charges has dramatically increased caseload (from 90 to 276 charges) and compliance rates (from 53% to 86%)
- ✓ **Improvements in compliance rates:**
Overall compliance is close to 61%
88% compliance rate for cases actually prosecuted
- ✓ **Impact on long-term school attendance**
92% of students who achieved full compliance, and 72% of students involved with Truancy Court in 2003-2004 completed the school year
60% of Truancy Court students in 2002-2003, and 55% of students in 2001-2002, continue to attend school regularly
- ✓ **Named 2003 Program of the Year** by the International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention

Looking at Outcomes

- **The average number of unexcused absences at the time of filing has decreased from 43.4 days in 1995-1996 to 22.4 days in 2003-2004, representing almost a 50% decrease.** In addition, there was more than a 12% decrease in unexcused absences at filing between last year and 2003-2004. This decrease reflects the hard work of school districts in charging truant students earlier and the impact of recent truancy legislation mandating referral to visiting teachers by schools after 10 unexcused absences.



- **Early intervention by decreasing the unexcused absences at the time of filing played a key role in improved compliance rate in 2003-2004.** 2003-2004 students who achieved full compliance with the Truancy Court had an average number of unexcused absences at the time of filing of 19.2 days, down from 20.87 days in 2002-2003. (Compare the average number of unexcused days for all students at the time of filing was 22.4 days.) Advances in early intervention played a key role in the improved compliance rates occurring in 2003-2004.
- **60.9% of the 882 cases closed in 2003-2004 achieved compliance with the Truancy Court.**
- This overall compliance rate is 5% higher than last year's compliance rate of 56%. It represents a meaningful achievement, given the substantial numbers of Truancy Court students who are difficult to reach because of long-term truancy problems well entrenched before they appear in Court, their advanced age (they are close to 16 years of age), their large number of the unexcused absences, or their extended involvement in the criminal/delinquency system.
- **88% of the 629 cases that were actually prosecuted had a successful outcome.**
- Included in the previous data of overall compliance are cases that have been filed in Truancy Court but were not prosecuted for a variety of reasons including resolution obtained through filing, pre-trial affirmative defense, and students and/or families relocating out of state. Developed with the assistance of the Statistical Analysis Center, this outcome truly reflects the impact of Truancy Court involvement on truancy cases.



- **Early intervention continues to support success – compliance rates for younger students were between 90% and 100% when the truant student is 12 years old or less in 2003-2004.**

- For 2003-2004, there were 276 students, age 12 or older, charged with the civil truancy charge of "Failure to Attend School." 86% of these cases had a positive outcome, including dispositions such as full compliance, or homebound instruction. This year's caseload reflects the full impact of recent legislation creating the civil truancy charge of "Failure to Attend School" for juveniles. This represents a dramatic increase from last year's 90 cases and a huge improvement in the compliance rate for those cases (from 53% last year to 86% this year). This year's decrease in unexcused absences at the time of filing has made an impact, as well as the Truancy Court's "Failure to Attend School" process, which holds youths directly accountable. Even when their parents are not able to resolve truancy issues, many teenagers, with help, are capable of and taking direct responsibility for their own actions.



LONG –TERM SCHOOL ATTENDANCE FOR TRUANCY COURT STUDENTS



92% of the students who achieved full compliance with the Truancy Court in **2003-2004** completed the school year.

72% of the 882 students involved with Truancy Court and whose cases were closed in **2003-2004** completed the school year.

60% of the 739 students involved with Truancy Court in **2002-2003** continue to attend school regularly.

55% of the students involved with Truancy Court in **2001-2002** continue to attend school regularly.

For New Castle County students only:*

2000-2001, 58% continues to attend school regularly.

1999-2000, 73% continues to attend school regularly.

1998-1999, 66% continues to attend school regularly.

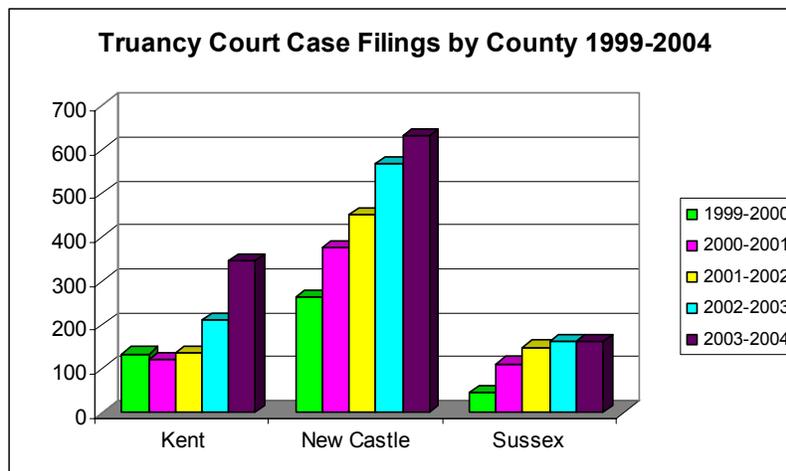
*Data not available for lower 2 counties in those years

Substantial educational gains continue to be made for students who have had the experience of participating in Truancy Court.

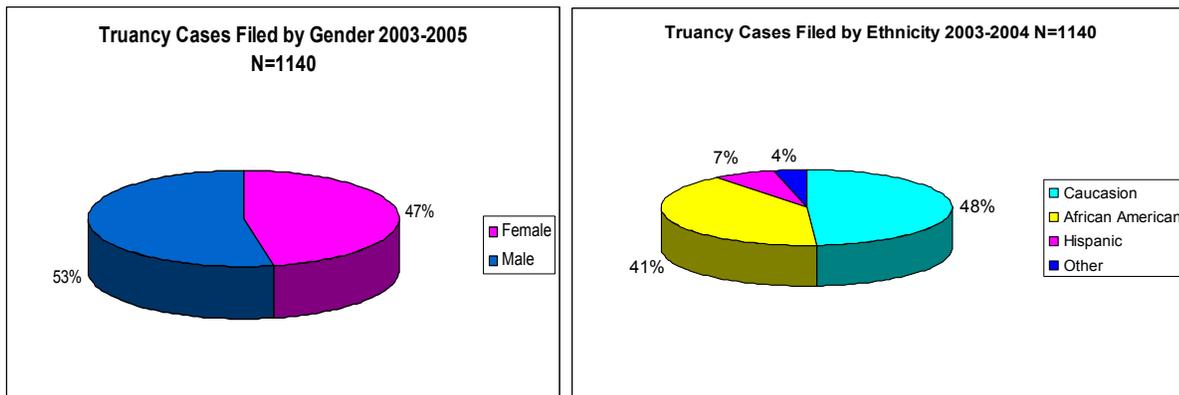
Truancy Court case filings comparison

School districts filing cases in Truancy Court include:

NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Appoquinimink	15	9	19
Brandywine	48	59	95
Christina	234	322	285
Colonial	59	60	88
Red Clay	96	128	136
NCC-Vo-Tech			6
Charter Schools			1
TOTAL	452	578	631
KENT COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Capital	32	67	51
Caesar Rodney	42	28	165
Lake Forest	17	51	40
Smyrna	22	61	89
Poly Tech		3	0
Charter Schools			2
TOTAL	136	210	347
SUSSEX COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Cape Henlopen	24	31	25
Delmar	26	28	42
Indian River	24	37	38
Laurel	36	27	18
Milford	25	8	17
Seaford	9	25	20
Woodbridge	5	8	3
TOTAL	149	163	162
GRAND TOTAL	737	951	1140



Student Profiles 2003-2004



At filing, the average age of truant students is 13 years old, and their average grade in school is 7th grade. Ethnic and gender representation in Truancy Court is comparable to Department of Education ethnicity and gender data for school districts generally.

Profile of a Truancy Court family

13 year old "Beth" lives with her guardian, "Aunt Mary", an older, distant relative. When Beth began missing school, Aunt Mary was charged in Truancy Court. The preliminary screening showed that they were homeless, that Beth suffered significant depression, and that Aunt Mary, who suffered from several health problems, had inadequate parenting skills. Court-related services helped Beth and Aunt Mary obtain a permanent home in subsidized housing. They also provided psychiatric help for Beth and home instruction until she was strong enough to resume attending school. Meanwhile, services provided to Aunt Mary helped her regain her health and learn new parenting skills. By the end of the school year, Beth had a new outlook on life, was regularly attending school and eagerly planning a summer working with the Truancy Court Boys and Girls Club Program.

Congratulations!

Initiatives 2003-2004

- Second annual statewide Truancy Court Graduation celebrated in June 2004 with 300 students and parents in attendance.
- Third year continuation of a grant-funded Kent County in partnership with the Boy's and Girl's Club working with older, chronically truant students.
- Services provided by Delaware State University Social Work and Wesley College psychology student interns benefiting school districts and Truancy Court through half year and yearlong internships.
- Implementation of "Electronic Monitoring" and "In Home Detention" through the Division of Youth Rehabilitation Services for youth meeting certain criteria.
- Four days of Truancy Court per month plus evening court established in Kent County to meet the growing caseload.
- One evening of court per week added in New Castle County for a total of ten full Truancy Court days in that county per month.
- Establishment of a close working relationship with the Delaware School Boards Association members.
- Continuing enhancement of consistency in policies and procedures for filing and management of truancy cases statewide.
- Presentation to the International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention Annual Conference (October 2003).
- Presentation to the City of Lexington, Kentucky as requested by the mayor's office on the Boys and Girls Club Partnership and the Truancy Court model to Lexington family service agencies (January 2004).
- Consultation with the State of Maryland on legislation to establish a Truancy Court in 5 Maryland counties based on the Delaware model (legislation passed and the project is scheduled to begin in January of 2005).
- Service Learning Project with Campus Community Charter School in Kent County to provide peer counseling with Truancy Court students using William Glasser's "Choice Theory."
- Community service projects developed by Chief of Security, Justice of the Peace Court, in Kent County.
- Continued public relations efforts to encourage schools to use the Truancy Court as an early intervention for students struggling with attendance.

What's next for Truancy Court in 2004-2005?

- Delaware's Truancy Court will receive the "**Crystal Star Award**" from the National Dropout Prevention Network at its Annual Conference in the fall of 2004. This nomination was made by the Delaware Department of Education.

- Establish school based Truancy Court, through a federal grant, to help manage the growing caseload and to broaden school impact.
- Participate in grant-funded partnerships in New Castle and Kent Counties for after school programs targeted at students in Truancy Court or at risk for truancy problems.
- Continue efforts to sustain and expand the Boy's and Girl's Club program model for chronically truant teenagers in all three counties.

Our deepest appreciation goes to Janet Urdahl, Truancy Court Coordinator, for all her work in preparing this report and her tremendous efforts on behalf of the Truancy Court.

*State of Delaware
Justice of the Peace Court
Truancy Court Report
September 2004*

*For further information contact:
Chief Magistrate's office
302-856-5871*