

Without education, the present shall see only heartache



“And nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing to look forward to with hope”

- Robert Frost

## State of Delaware Justice of the Peace Court



Truancy Court

Annual Report 2008 - 2009



## The Truancy Court Model

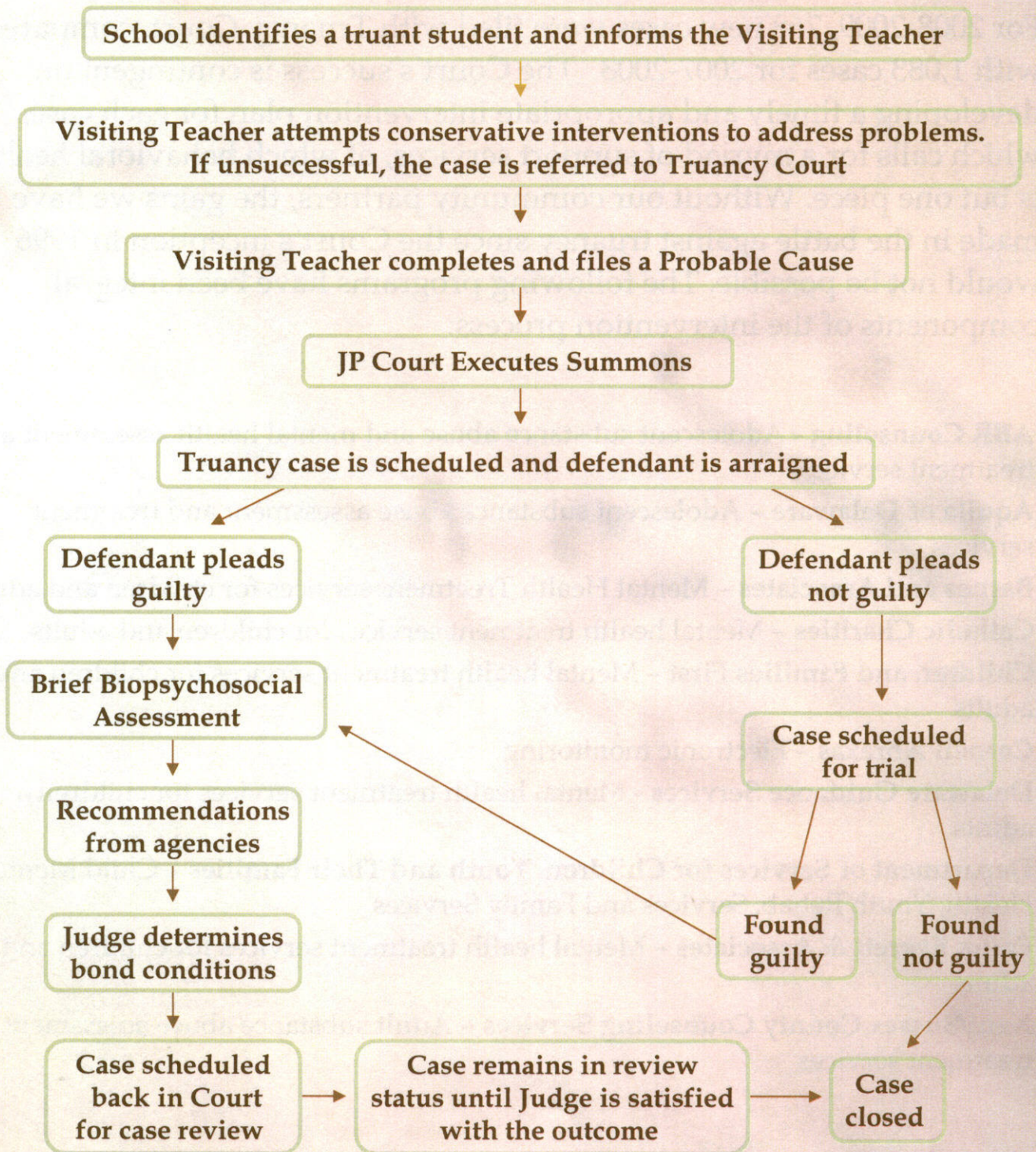
Truancy historically has been a reliable predictor of juvenile delinquency and often is a signal of personal and/or family issues that have gone without appropriate interventions. Some of these issues include homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, child abuse/neglect, unmet educational needs and limited access to healthcare. Delaware's Truancy Court serves as the hub for the support and intervention services necessary to address these issues, thereby increasing the likelihood of consistent school attendance. Truancy Court is innovative in its remedial, non-punitive approach to improving school attendance, as opposed to the more disciplinary measures of enforcing the law and mandating change seen in traditional court settings. The comprehensive, wrap-around approach to addressing truancy is evidenced by the parties involved in a typical truancy case. In addition to the parent and child, the following people are vital components of the process:

- Judge trained in handling Truancy cases
- Behavioral health providers who take referrals, conduct drug testing and schedule assessments
- Educational advocates and outreach partners
- Informal community supports

In addition to these partners, Truancy Court works closely with the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families. The Court maintains contact with active workers through Child Mental Health, Family Services, and Youth Rehabilitative Services in order to make informed decisions, initiate appropriate interventions, and avoid duplication of services.



## How a Case Enters Truancy Court





## The Truancy Court Partners

For 2008-2009, 768 new cases were filed with Truancy Court, compared with 1,083 cases for 2007-2008. The Court's success is contingent on developing a timely and appropriate intervention plan for each case, which calls for a myriad of support services, of which behavioral health is but one piece. Without our community partners, the gains we have made in the battle against truancy since the Court's inception in 1996 would not be possible. The following programs have been integral components of the intervention process:

- **ABR Counseling** - Adolescent substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services
- **Aquila of Delaware** - Adolescent substance abuse assessment and treatment services
- **Barnes and Associates** - Mental Health Treatment services for children and adults
- **Catholic Charities** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Children and Families First** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Cornell Abraxas** - Electronic monitoring
- **Delaware Guidance Services** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families** - Child Mental Health, Youth Rehab. Services and Family Services
- **Frank Everett & Associates** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Kent/Sussex County Counseling Services** - Adult substance abuse assessment and treatment services



- **People's Place** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
- **Phoenix Mental Health** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
- **Project Stay Free** (NCC) – Electronic Monitoring
- **SODAT** (NCC) – Substance abuse assessment and treatment services for children and adults

### **The Visiting Teachers**

Over the past four years, there have been 3,946 cases filed with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers are not only responsible for filing charges with the Court, but also for the ongoing monitoring of attendance and academic performance of each case until closure with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers attend arraignments, as well as all subsequent case reviews, serving as the primary source of information for the judges.

In addition, their close monitoring in between reviews allows for swift intervention, should a case deteriorate and require more immediate action by the Court. If Truancy Court is better viewed as a fluid reaction of events, then the Visiting Teachers are the catalysts, precipitating the energy for positive change. But their work begins long before Truancy charges are filed with the Court. The filing of charges against a parent and/or student represents the more aggressive intervention in addressing truancy. Prior to this step, the Visiting Teachers utilize more conservative, but no less vital, measures in an effort to engage parents and students.

These strategies can include face-to-face meetings with parents, students and school staff (in the home or school), agenda books, attendance contracts, tutoring, transportation assistance, after-school programming, and reviews of special education components.



In summary, the Visiting Teachers use their diverse experiences in education, counseling, social work, and administration to comprehensively assess cases and identify not only the obstacles to regular attendance, but also the solutions. It is only after their considerable efforts have proven ineffective that they bring a case to Truancy Court. It is important that their community outreach efforts on behalf of Delaware's students are recognized.

### **The Truancy Court Judges**

A review of the Truancy Court landscape amidst the backdrop of an annual report would not be complete without recognizing the Judges and their contributions to the process. Their specialized training, experience and diverse backgrounds provide for innovative interventions, uniquely nurturing yet authoritative guidance, and insights necessary for serving a wide range of student profiles, from the elementary student with 6 unexcused absences to the 15 year old on Level III probation whose days out of school far outnumber those attended. We wish to thank the Truancy Judges for their assiduous efforts on behalf of this segment of Delaware's student population.

### **Looking at the Numbers**

A review of the statistics for 2008-2009 indicates a 29% decrease in statewide filings compared with 2007-2008. This marks the largest decrease in filings since Truancy Court's inception. New Castle County filings decreased 27% from 2007-2008. Kent County filings were down 44.5% from 2007-2008 when 276 cases were filed. Sussex County filings decreased by 15%, compared to 2007-2008.



## Cross Comparison of Case Filings

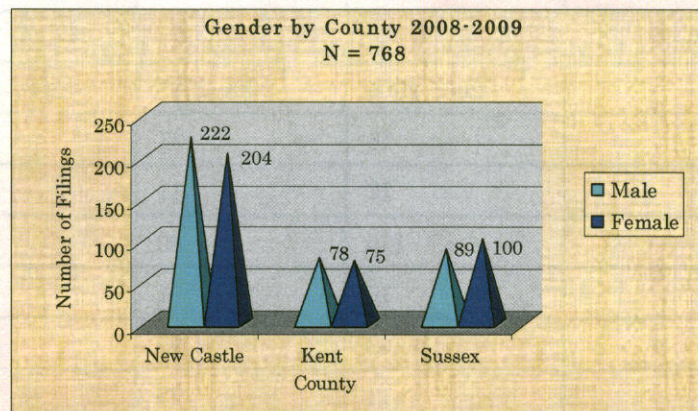
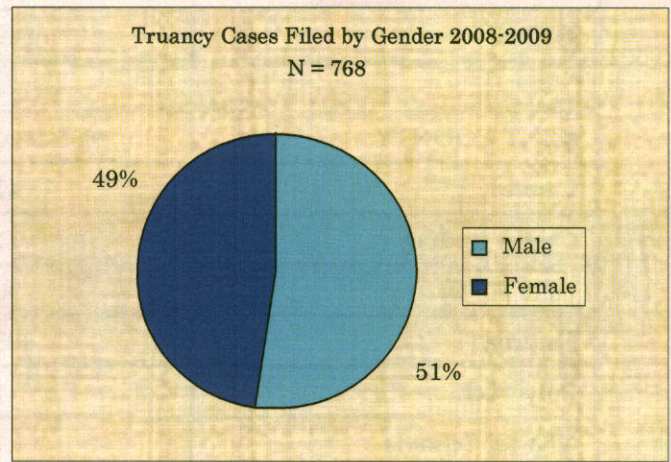
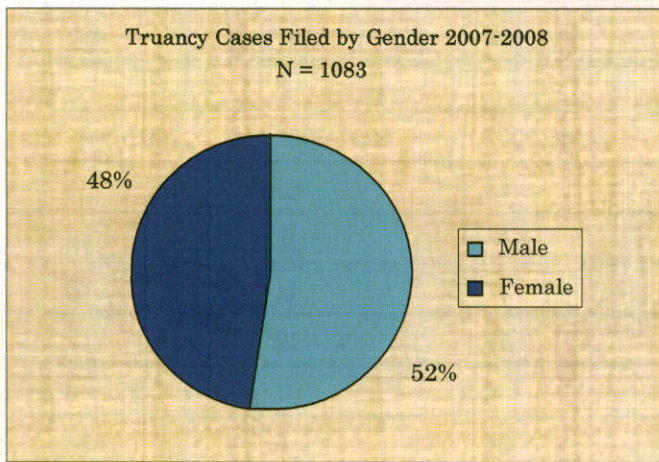
NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Appoquinimink	6	28	7	18
Brandywine	144	140	188	90
Christina	226	157	218	123
Colonial	93	60	95	128
Red Clay	80	76	68	60
NCC-Vo-Tech	0	5	9	0
Charter Schools	0	0	0	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>426</b>
KENT COUNTY	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Capital	42	44	65	36
Caesar Rodney	71	63	48	49
Lake Forest	30	47	44	48
Smyrna	103	92	112	7
Poly Tech	1	0	1	0
Charter Schools	1	84	6	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>153</b>
SUSSEX COUNTY	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Cape Henlopen	18	31	11	19
Delmar	18	11	43	16
Indian River	126	80	88	67
Laurel	10	11	21	9
Milford	63	55	21	46
Seaford	11	25	14	7
Woodbridge	26	17	24	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>768</b>



## Student Demographics

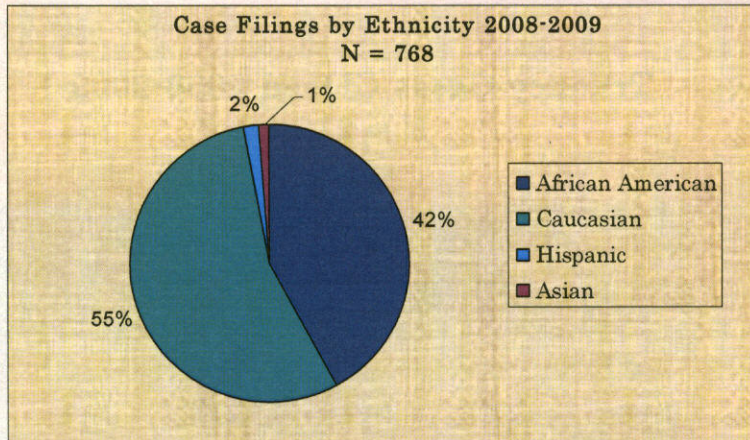
For 2008-2009, cases filed with Truancy Court averaged 13.14 years of age and a grade level of 6.34. These numbers represent a slight increase from 2007-2008.

As evidenced below, the gender disparity among cases filed with Truancy Court in 2008-2009 was nearly identical to 2007-2008. Male students active with the Court continue to outnumber their female counterparts when viewing the numbers on a statewide level. Gender by county is also indicated below.



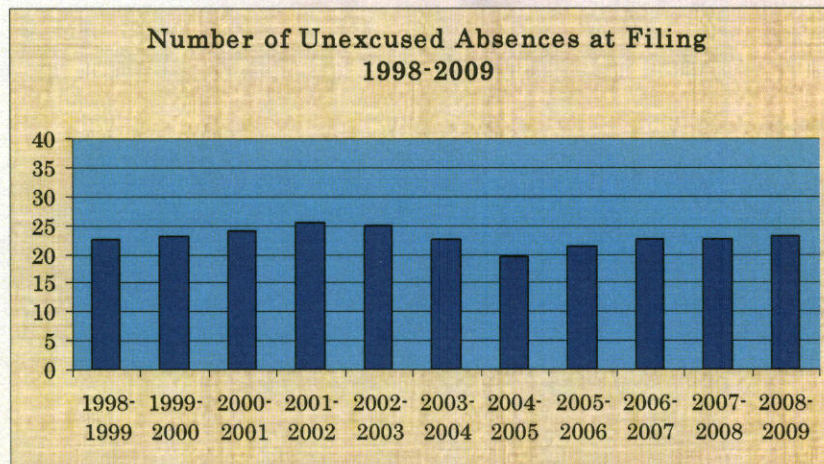
Caucasians remained the largest segment of cases filed with Truancy Court in 2008-2009 (55%), a 2% decrease from 2007-2008. African-Americans comprised 42% of filings for 2008-2009, compared to 40% in 2007-2008.





### Absences at Filing

The average number of unexcused absences at filing for 2008-2009 was 23.2. This represents a slight increase from 2007-2008 (22.6). 2004-2005 remains the only year since the Truancy Court's inception that the average number of unexcused absences at filing was below 20.

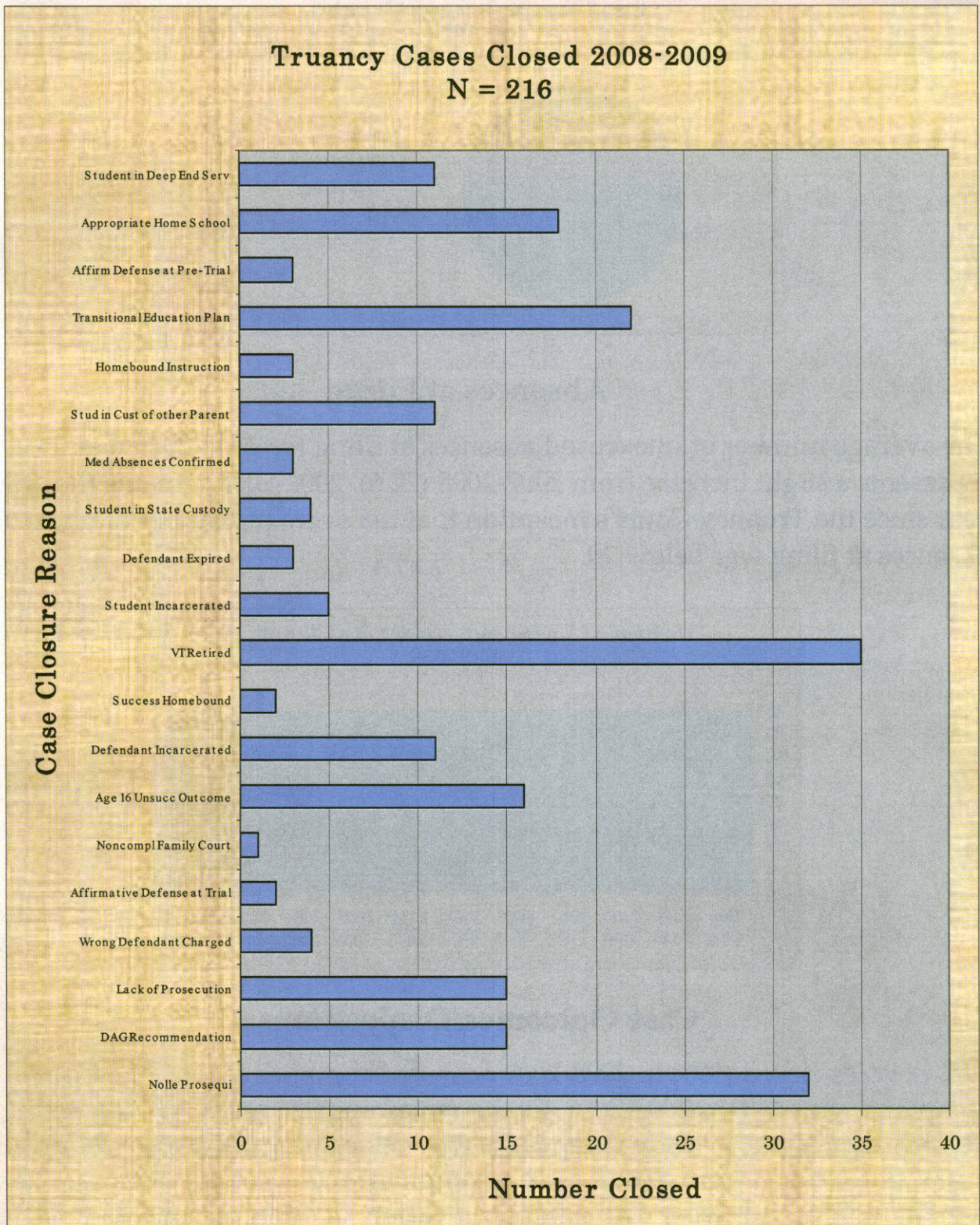


### Case Outcomes/Dispositions

47% of cases closed (999) in 2008-2009 achieved compliance with the Court, compared with 43% in 2007-2008. Of the remaining 528 cases, 95 were Visiting Teacher dismissals, 79 were defendants who relocated in Delaware, 74 moved out of state and 64 were closed as non-compliant-unsuccessful outcome. The remaining 216 cases were dismissed for a variety of other reasons, as depicted in the following graph.



## Truancy Cases Closed 2008-2009 N = 216





## *Thank You*

Among the countless interactions between students and families, Visiting Teachers, Judges, behavioral health providers and community partners, it is easy to forget the people behind the scenes. Those individuals who provide the community outreach, maintain safety in the courtrooms, and process the paperwork for thousands of case events are as vital to the system as any of the aforementioned components. They set the example and a standard of teamwork from which all of us could learn. Without them, the system would surely come to a halt. It is important to recognize these dedicated Judicial Case Processors, Security Officers, Constables and Court Managers for their immeasurable contributions.



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