

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 2007 - 2008

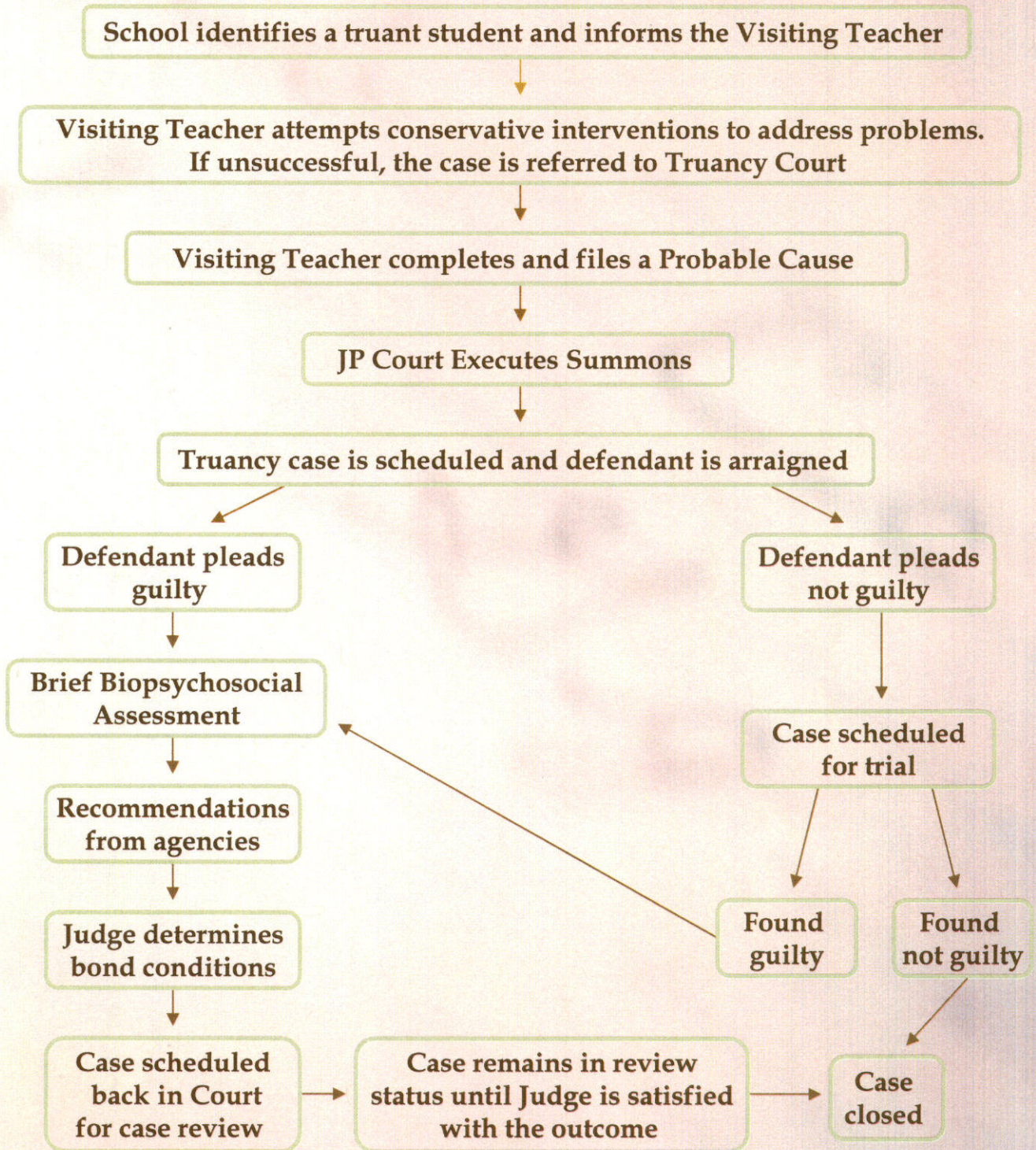
The Truancy Court Model

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
- Social worker to assess, query and screen 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 2007-2008, 1,083 new cases were filed with Truancy Court, compared with 1,026 cases for 2006-2007. Over the same two year span, the Court made nearly 500 behavioral health referrals. Approximately 40% of these referrals were for substance abuse treatment, often based on drug screening conducted after arraignment or at case review. 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
- **Family Court** - Processing of Criminal Contempt charges out of Truancy Court
- **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 4,269 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. The Truancy Judges presided over more than 3,900 arraignments and case reviews for 2007-2008. 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 2007-2008 indicates a 5.6% increase in statewide filings compared with 2006-2007. This marks the first time since 2003-2004 that statewide filings increased. New Castle County filings increased 25.5% from 2006-2007, the first such increase since 2003-2004. While Kent County filings were down 16.4% from 2006-2007, Sussex County filings were nearly unchanged with only a 3.5% decrease. A closer inspection of Kent County shows that the decrease in filings can be attributed to the drastic 93% drop in Charter School filings. The following table provides a more thorough break down of the last four years.

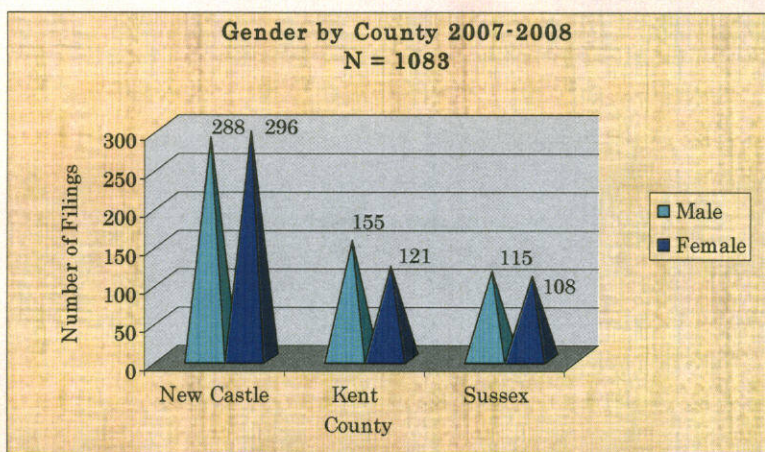
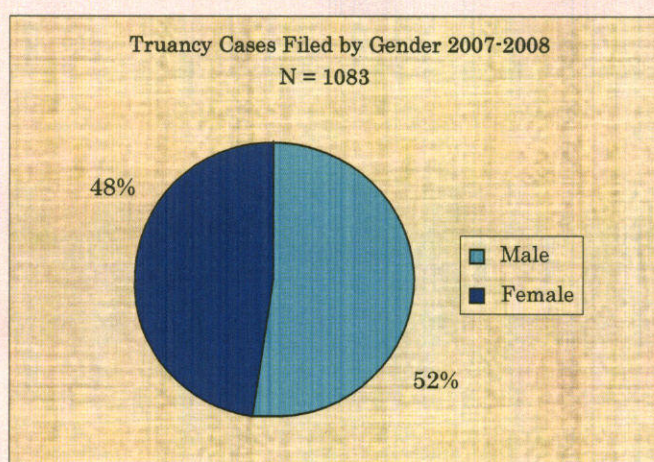
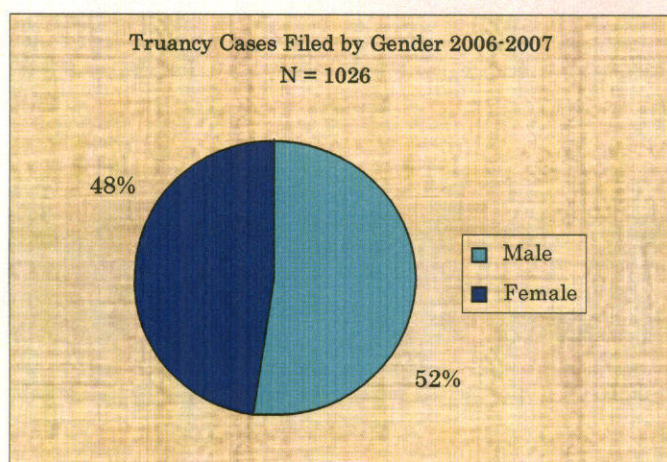
Cross Comparison of Case Filings

NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Appoquinimink	10	6	28	7
Brandywine	76	144	140	188
Christina	260	226	157	218
Colonial	69	93	60	95
Red Clay	134	80	76	68
NCC-Vo-Tech	3	0	5	9
Charter Schools	2	0	0	0
TOTAL	554	549	466	585
KENT COUNTY	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Capital	84	42	44	65
Caesar Rodney	119	71	63	48
Lake Forest	47	30	47	44
Smyrna	87	103	92	112
Poly Tech	2	1	0	1
Charter Schools	3	1	84	6
TOTAL	342	248	330	276
SUSSEX COUNTY	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Cape Henlopen	30	18	31	11
Delmar	14	18	11	43
Indian River	55	126	80	88
Laurel	3	10	11	21
Milford	64	63	55	21
Seaford	17	11	25	14
Woodbridge	12	26	17	24
TOTAL	195	272	230	222
GRAND TOTAL	1091	1069	1026	1083

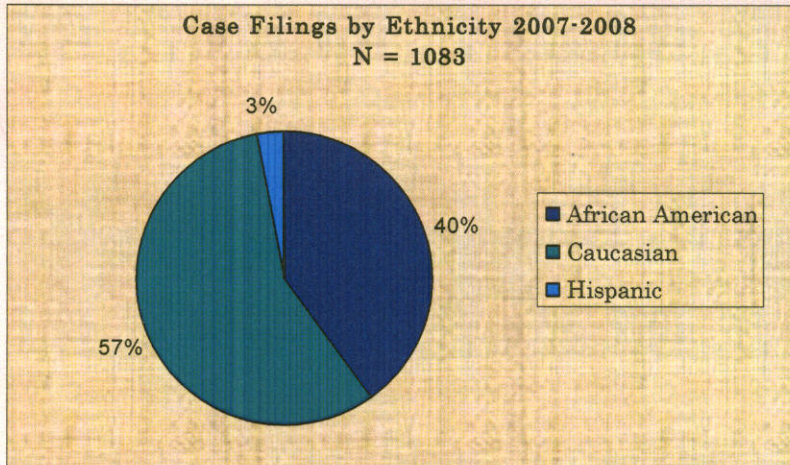
Student Demographics

For 2007-2008, cases filed with Truancy Court averaged 12.8 years of age and a grade level of 6. These numbers are virtually identical to the data for 2006-2007.

As evidenced below, the gender disparity among cases filed with Truancy Court in 2007-2008 was identical to 2006-2007. 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.

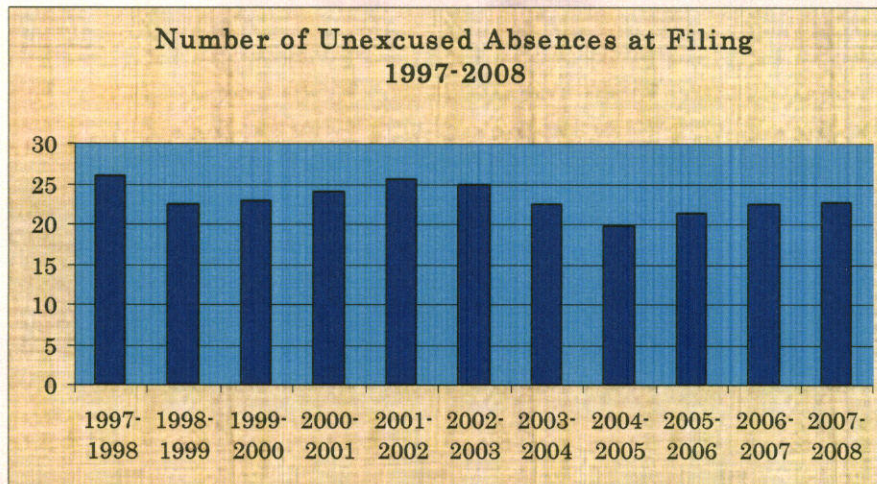


Caucasians remained the largest segment of cases filed with Truancy Court in 2007-2008 (57%), an 8% increase from 2006-2007. African-Americans comprised 40% of filings for 2007-2008, compared with 45% in 2006-2007. The percentage of Hispanic filings decreased 2% from 2006-2007.



Absences at Filing

The average number of unexcused absences at filing for 2007-2008 was 22.6. This is only negligibly higher than 2006-2007 (22.4). 2004-2005 remains the only year since the Truancy Court's inception that the average number of unexcused absences at filing was below 20.

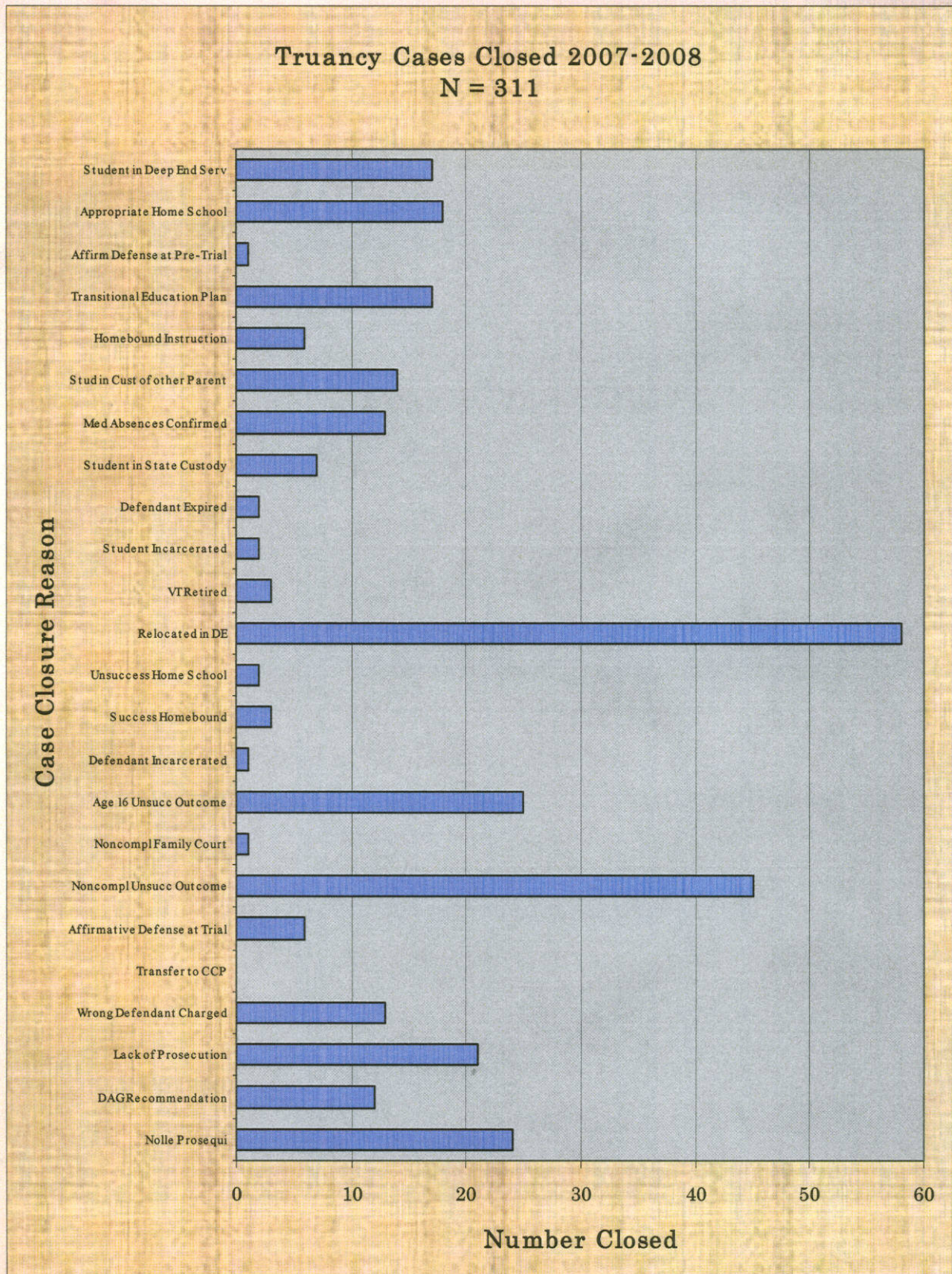


Case Outcomes/Dispositions

43% of cases closed (1093) in 2007-2008 achieved compliance with the Court, compared with 42% in 2006-2007. Of the remaining 619 cases, 198 were Visiting Teacher dismissals and 110 were defendants who moved out of state. The remaining 311 cases were dismissed for a variety of other reasons, as depicted in the following graph. This provides for an in-depth look at the wide range of Truancy Court outcomes.

Truancy Cases Closed 2007-2008

N = 311



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.



For more information about Truancy Court, contact:

Edward Atwood, M.S.Ed.
Truancy Court Coordinator
Justice of the Peace Court

480 Bank Lane, Dover, DE 19904
Phone: 302-739-1293
FAX: 302-739-7590
Email: Edward.Atwood@state.de.us